Gardner Webb College Library

Presented

By

Mrs. Margaret Anderson

THE CURIOSITY MERCHANT

Balzac, vol. twenty-one—Frontis

HONORÉ DE BALZAC

IN TWENTY-FIVE VOLUMES

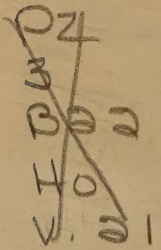
The First Complete Translation into English

THE WILD ASS'S SKIN
THE QUEST OF THE ABSOLUTE

Volume Twenty-One

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS FROM DRAWINGS ON THE WOOD
BY FAMOUS FRENCH ARTISTS

New York
PETER FENELON COLLIER & SON
·MCM·



PQ
2161
.C65
v.21

Balzac
V. 21
Gardner Webb College Library

CONTENTS

Preface.....

The Wild Ass's Skin.....

Preface.....

The Quest of the Absolute.....

31530

THE WILD ASS'S SKIN

PREFACE

THE "Peau de Chagrin" is the one book of Balzac's which it is difficult for those who know it to approach without a somewhat uncritical enthusiasm. It is not faultless; no book of his is, and this cannot challenge the epithet even to the extent to which not a few others can challenge it. It is earlier than almost any of the mature novels, except the "Chouans"; and it bears in some respects the marks of its earliness as well as, in others, those of that rather artificial scheme of representing life, which was so strongly characteristic of the author, and which, while it helped him in conceiving the "Comédie Humaine," imposed a certain restraint and hamper on the Comédie itself. We could spare a good deal of the journalist and other talk at the orgy; and more persons than Emile have gone to sleep over, or have escaped sleep only by skipping, the unconscionable length of Raphael's story.

But these are the merest and most miserable of details. In the first place, the conception is of the very finest. You may call it an *étude philosophique*, or you may not; you may class it as an "allegory" on the banks of the Nile or the Seine, or any other river, if you like. Neither title will do it any harm, and neither can explain it or exalt it higher. The Law of Nemesis—the law that every extraordinary expansion or satisfaction of heart or brain or will is paid for—paid for inevitably, incommutably, without the possibility of putting off or transferring the payment—is one of the truths about which no human being with a soul a little above the brute has the slightest doubt. It may be put

religiously as, "Know that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment"; or philosophically, as in the same book, "All things are double, one against the other"; or in any other fashion or language. But it is an eternal and immutable verity, and the soul of man bears witness to it.

It is Balzac's way to provide abundant, and not always economically arranged backgrounds and contrasts for his central pictures; and the gaming-house (the model of how many gaming-houses since?), the gorgeous *capharnaum* of the curiosity shop, and the "orgy" provide these in the present case lavishly enough. The orgy is undoubtedly the weakest. It is only touched with others by the pleasant and good-humored skit of Gautier in "Les Jeune-France"; but the note there struck is, as usual with "Théo," the right one. You cannot "organize" an orgy; the thing comes naturally or not at all; and in the splendors of Taillefer, as in those of Trimalchio, there is a certain coldness.

But this is soon forgotten in the absorbing interest of the Skin and its master. The only adverse comment which has ever occurred to me is, that one might perhaps have expected a longer period of *insouciance*, of more or less reckless enjoyment of the privileges, to elapse before a vivid consciousness of the curse and of the penalty. I know no answer, unless it be that Balzac took the orgy itself to be, as it were, the wild oats of Raphael's period—in which case he had not much to show for it. But when the actual consciousness wakes, when the Skin has been measured on the napkin, and its shrinking noted, nothing is questionable any longer. The frenzied anxiety of the victim is not overdone; the way in which his very frenzy leads him to make greater and ever greater draughts on his capital of power without any corresponding satisfaction is masterly. And the close is more masterly still. To some tastes the actual conclusion may be a thought too allegorical, but in *mil-huit-cent-trente* your allegory was your only wear; and Gautier, in the pleasant book above cited, was thoroughly in the fashion when he audaciously put a hidden

literary meaning on the merry tale of "Celle-ci et celle-là." Here, too, if anywhere, the opposition of Pauline and Fœdora in this way is justified. It softens off the too high-strung tragedy of the catastrophe at the same time that it points the moral, and it rounds as much as it adorns the tale.

It has been observed, in no carping or hypercritical spirit, that passages of the book are somewhat high-flown in style. The fact is that Balzac had rather a tendency to this style, and only outgrew it, if he ever did outgrow it, by dint of its greater and greater unfitness for his chosen subjects. Here, if anywhere, it was excusable, just as here, if anywhere, the gigantic element in his genius found scope and play. There had been some "inventories" in literature before, and there have been many more since the description of the curiosity shop; but none, if we except the brief Shakespearian perfection of that in Clarence's dream, and none at all in a heaped and minute style, can approach this. The thing is nightmarish—you *see* the *magots* and the armor, the pictures and the statues, and among them all the sinister "piece of shagreen," with the ineffaceable letters stamped on it.

And so over all the book there is the note of the *voyant*, of the seer who sees and who makes others see. This note is seldom an idyllic or merely pleasant one; the writer who has it must have, even in such a book as the "Médecin de Campagne," a black thread in his twist, a sombre background to his happy valley. Here the subject not only excuses but demands a constant sombreness, a tone of thunder in the air, of eclipse and earthquake. And the tone is given. A very miserable person would he be who endeavored to pick out burlesque points in the "Peau de Chagrin," the most apocalyptic of the novels of the nineteenth century, and yet one of the most soberly true in general theme and theory. When one thinks of the tireless efforts which have been made, especially of late years, to "pejorate" pessimism and blacken gloom, and of the too general conclusion of yawn or laugh to which they bring us, it is doubly curious to come back to this sermon by a very unpriestly preacher

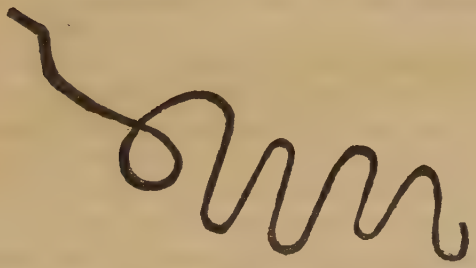
on the simple text, "Whom the gods curse, to him they grant the desires of his heart."

"La Peau de Chagrin" appeared first in August, 1831, published in two volumes, by Gosselin and Canel, with a Preface and a "Moralité," which the author afterward cut out. Of its four chapters or divisions the first originally bore the title of the whole book, and the last that of "Conclusion," not "Epilogue," which was afterward affixed to it. One or two fragments, not incorporated in the finished book, exist, having been previously published. Balzac reviewed it himself, more than once, in the "Caricature" and elsewhere, both at its first appearance and afterward, when it reappeared in the same year with other stories and a new Preface by Philarète Chasles as "Romans et Contes Philosophiques." This was republished more than once till, in 1835, it took rank anew in the "Etudes Philosophiques," while ten years later, under the same sub-title, it was finally classed in the first complete arrangement of the "Comédie Humaine."

THE WILD ASS'S SKIN

TO MONSIEUR SAVARY

Member of L'Academie des Sciences



STERNE—*Tristram Shandy*, ch. cccxxii.

I

THE TALISMAN

TOWARD the end of the month of October, 1829, a young man entered the Palais-Royal just as the gaming-houses opened, agreeably to the law which protects a passion by its very nature easily excisable. He mounted the staircase of one of the gambling hells distinguished by the number 36, without too much deliberation.

"Your hat, sir, if you please?" a thin, querulous voice called out. A little old man, crouching in the darkness behind a railing, suddenly rose and exhibited his features, carved after a mean design.

As you enter a gaming-house the law despoils you of your hat at the outset. Is it by way of a parable, a divine revelation? Or by exacting some pledge or other, is not an infernal compact implied? Is it done to compel you to preserve a respectful demeanor toward those who are about to

gain money of you? Or must the detective, who squats in our social sewers, know the name of your hatter, or your own, if you happen to have written it on the lining inside? Or, after all, is the measurement of your skull required for the compilation of statistics as to the cerebral capacity of gamblers? The executive is absolutely silent on this point. But be sure of this, that though you have scarcely taken a step toward the tables, your hat no more belongs to you now than you belong to yourself. Play possesses you, your fortune, your cap, your cane, your cloak.

As you go out, it will be made clear to you, by a savage irony, that Play has yet spared you something, since your property is returned. For all that, if you bring a new hat with you, you will have to pay for the knowledge that a special costume is needed for a gambler.

The evident astonishment with which the young man took a numbered tally in exchange for his hat, which was fortunately somewhat rubbed at the brim, showed clearly enough that his mind was yet untainted; and the little old man, who had wallowed from his youth up in the furious pleasures of a gambler's life, cast a dull, indifferent glance over him, in which a philosopher might have seen wretchedness lying in the hospital, the vagrant lives of ruined folk, inquests on numberless suicides, life-long penal servitude and transportations to Guazacoalco.

His pallid, lengthy visage appeared like a haggard embodiment of the passion reduced to its simplest terms. There were traces of past anguish in its wrinkles. He supported life on the glutinous soups at Darcet's, and gambled away his meagre earnings day by day. Like some old hackney which takes no heed of the strokes of the whip, nothing could move him now. The stifled groans of ruined players, as they passed out, their mute imprecations, their stupefied faces, found him impassive. He was the spirit of Play incarnate. If the young man had noticed this sorry Cerberus, perhaps he would have said, "There is only a pack of cards in that heart of his."

The stranger did not heed this warning writ in flesh and blood, put there, no doubt, by Providence, who has set loathing on the threshold of all evil haunts. He walked boldly into the saloon, where the rattle of coin brought his senses under the dazzling spell of an agony of greed. Most likely he had been drawn thither by that most convincing of Jean Jacques' eloquent periods, which expresses, I think, this melancholy thought, "Yes, I can imagine that a man may take to gambling when he sees only his last shilling between him and death."

There is an illusion about a gambling saloon at night as vulgar as that of a bloodthirsty drama, and just as effective. The rooms are filled with players and onlookers, with poverty-stricken age, which drags itself thither in search of stimulation, with excited faces, and revels that began in wine, to end shortly in the Seine. The passion is there in full measure, but the great number of the actors prevents you from seeing the gambling-demon face to face. The evening is a harmony or chorus in which all take part, to which each instrument in the orchestra contributes his share. You would see there plenty of respectable people who have come in search of diversion, for which they pay as they pay for the pleasures of the theatre, or of gluttony, or they come hither as to some garret where they cheapen poignant regrets for three months to come.

Do you understand all the force and frenzy in a soul which impatiently waits for the opening of a gambling hell? Between the daylight gambler and the player at night there is the same difference that lies between a careless husband and the lover swooning under his lady's window. Only with morning comes the real throb of the passion and the craving in its stark horror. Then you can admire the real gambler, who has neither eaten, slept, thought, nor lived, he has so smarted under the scourge of his martingale, so suffered on the rack of his desire for a coup of *trente-et-quarante.* At that accursed hour you encounter eyes whose calmness terrifies you, faces that fas-

cinate, glances that seem as if they had power to turn the cards over and consume them. The grandest hours of a gambling saloon are not the opening ones. If Spain has bullfights, and Rome once had her gladiators, Paris waxes proud of her Palais-Royal, where the inevitable *roulettes* cause blood to flow in streams, and the public can have the pleasure of watching without fear of their feet slipping in it.

Take a quiet peep at the arena. How bare it looks! The paper on the walls is greasy to the height of your head, there is nothing to bring one reviving thought. There is not so much as a nail for the convenience of suicides. The floor is worn and dirty. An oblong table stands in the middle of the room, the tablecloth is worn by the friction of gold, but the straw-bottomed chairs about it indicate an odd indifference to luxury in the men who will lose their lives here in the quest of the fortune that is to put luxury within their reach.

This contradiction in humanity is seen wherever the soul reacts powerfully upon itself. The gallant would clothe his mistress in silks, would deck her out in soft Eastern fabrics, though he and she must lie on a truckle-bed. The ambitious dreamer sees himself at the summit of power, while he slavishly prostrates himself in the mire. The tradesman stagnates in his damp, unhealthy shop, while he builds a great mansion for his son to inherit prematurely, only to be ejected from it by law proceedings at his own brother's instance.

After all, is there a less pleasing thing in the world than a house of pleasure? Singular question! Man is always at strife with himself. His present woes give the lie to his hopes; yet he looks to a future which is not his, to indemnify him for these present sufferings; setting upon all his actions the seal of inconsequence and of the weakness of his nature. We have nothing here below in full measure but misfortune.

There were several gamblers in the room already when the young man entered. Three bald-headed seniors were

lounging round the green table. Imperturbable as diplomatists, those plaster-cast faces of theirs betokened blunted sensibilities, and hearts which had long forgotten how to throb, even when a woman's dowry was the stake. A young Italian, olive-hued and dark-haired, sat at one end, with his elbows on the table, seeming to listen to the presentiments of luck that dictate a gambler's "Yes" or "No." The glow of fire and gold was on that southern face. Some seven or eight onlookers stood, by way of an audience, awaiting a drama composed of the strokes of chance, the faces of the actors, the circulation of coin, and the motion of the croupier's rake, much as a silent, motionless crowd watches the headsman in the Place de Grève. A tall, thin man, in a threadbare coat, held a card in one hand, and a pin in the other, to mark the numbers of Red or Black. He seemed a modern Tantalus, with all the pleasures of his epoch at his lips, a hoardless miser drawing in imaginary gains, a sane species of lunatic who consoles himself in his misery by chimerical dreams, a man who touches peril and vice as a young priest handles the unconsecrated wafer in the white mass.

One or two experts at the game, shrewd speculators, had placed themselves opposite the bank, like old convicts who have lost all fear of the hulks; they meant to try two or three coups, and then to depart at once with the expected gains, on which they lived. Two elderly waiters dawdled about with their arms folded, looking from time to time into the garden from the windows, as if to show their insignificant faces as a sign to passers-by.

The croupier and banker threw a ghastly and withering glance at the punters, and cried, in a sharp voice, "Make your game!" as the young man came in. The silence seemed to grow deeper as all heads turned curiously toward the new arrival. Who would have thought it? The jaded elders, the fossilized waiters, the onlookers, the fanatical Italian himself, felt an indefinable dread at sight of the stranger. Is he not wretched indeed who can

excite pity here? Must he not be very helpless to receive sympathy, ghastly in appearance to raise a shudder in these places, where pain utters no cry, where wretchedness looks gay, and despair is decorous? Such thoughts as these produced a new emotion in these torpid hearts as the young man entered. Were not executioners known to shed tears over the fair-haired, girlish heads that had to fall at the bidding of the Revolution?

The gamblers saw at a glance a dreadful mystery in the novice's face. His young features were stamped with a melancholy grace, his looks told of unsuccess and many blighted hopes. The dull apathy of the suicide had made his forehead so deadly pale, a bitter smile carved faint lines about the corners of his mouth, and there was an abandonment about him that was painful to see. Some sort of demon sparkled in the depths of his eyes, which drooped, wearied perhaps with pleasure. Could it have been dissipation that had set its foul mark on the proud face, once pure and bright, and now brought low? Any doctor seeing the yellow circles about his eyelids, and the color in his cheeks, would have set them down to some affection of the heart or lungs, while poets would have attributed them to the havoc brought by the search for knowledge and to night vigils by the student's lamp.

But a complaint more fatal than any disease, a disease more merciless than genius or study, had drawn this young face, and had wrung a heart which dissipation, study, and sickness had scarcely disturbed. When a notorious criminal is taken to the convicts' prison, the prisoners welcome him respectfully, and these evil spirits in human shape, experienced in torments, bowed before an unheard-of anguish. By the depth of the wound which met their eyes, they recognized a prince among them, by the majesty of his unspoken irony, by the refined wretchedness of his garb. The frockcoat that he wore was well cut, but his cravat was on terms so intimate with his waistcoat that no one could suspect him of underlinen. His hands, shapely as a woman's, were not perfectly clean; for two days past

indeed he had ceased to wear gloves. If the very croupier and the waiters shuddered, it was because some traces of the spell of innocence yet hung about his meagre, delicately-shaped form, and his scanty fair hair in its natural curls.

He looked only about twenty-five years of age, and any trace of vice in his face seemed to be there by accident. A young constitution still resisted the inroads of lubricity. Darkness and light, annihilation and existence, seemed to struggle in him, with effects of mingled beauty and terror. There he stood like some erring angel that has lost his radiance; and these emeritus-professors of vice and shame were ready to bid the novice depart, even as some toothless crone might be seized with pity for a beautiful girl who offers herself up to infamy.

The young man went straight up to the table, and, as he stood there, flung down a piece of gold which he held in his hand, without deliberation. It rolled on to the Black; then, as strong natures can, he looked calmly, if anxiously, at the croupier, as if he held useless subterfuges in scorn.

The interest this coup awakened was so great that the old gamesters laid nothing upon it; only the Italian, inspired by a gambler's enthusiasm, smiled suddenly at some thought, and punted his heap of coin against the stranger's stake.

The banker forgot to pronounce the phrases that use and wont have reduced to an inarticulate cry—"Make your game . . . The game is made. . . . Bets are closed." The croupier spread out the cards and seemed to wish luck to the newcomer, indifferent as he was to the losses or gains of those who took part in these sombre pleasures. Every bystander thought he saw a drama, the closing scene of a noble life, in the fortunes of that bit of gold, and eagerly fixed his eyes on the prophetic cards; but however closely they watched the young man, they could discover not the least sign of feeling on his cool but restless face.

"Even! red wins," said the croupier officially. A dumb sort of rattle came from the Italian's throat when he saw the

folded notes that the banker showered upon him, one after another. The young man only understood his calamity when the croupier's rake was extended to sweep away his last napoleon. The ivory touched the coin with a little click, as it swept it with the speed of an arrow into the heap of gold before the bank. The stranger turned pale at the lips, and softly shut his eyes, but he unclosed them again at once, and the red color returned as he affected the airs of an Englishman, to whom life can offer no new sensation, and disappeared without the glance full of entreaty for compassion that a desperate gamester will often give the bystanders. How much can happen in a second's space; how many things depend on a throw of the die!

"That was his last cartridge, of course," said the croupier, smiling after a moment's silence, during which he picked up the coin between his finger and thumb and held it up.

"He is a cracked brain that will go and drown himself," said a frequenter of the place. He looked round about at the other players, who all knew each other.

"Bah!" said a waiter, as he took a pinch of snuff.

"If we had but followed *his* example," said an old gamester to the others, as he pointed out the Italian.

Everybody looked at the lucky player, whose hands shook as he counted his banknotes.

"A voice seemed to whisper to me," he said. "The luck is sure to go against that young man's despair."

"He is a new hand," said the banker, "or he would have divided his money into three parts to give himself more chance."

The young man went out without asking for his hat; but the old watch-dog, who had noted its shabby condition, returned it to him without a word. The gambler mechanically gave up the tally, and went downstairs whistling "Di tanti Palpiti" so feebly that he himself scarcely heard the delicious notes.

He found himself immediately under the arcades of the

Palais-Royal, reached the Rue Saint Honoré, took the direction of the Tuileries, and crossed the gardens with an undecided step. He walked as if he were in some desert, elbowed by men whom he did not see, hearing through all the voices of the crowd one voice alone—the voice of Death. He was lost in the thoughts that benumbed him at last, like the criminals who used to be taken in carts from the Palais de Justice to the Place de Grève, where the scaffold awaited them reddened with all the blood spilled there since 1793.

There is something great and terrible about suicide. Most people's downfalls are not dangerous; they are like children who have not far to fall, and cannot injure themselves; but when a great nature is dashed down, he is bound to fall from a height. He must have been raised almost to the skies; he has caught glimpses of some heaven beyond his reach. Vehement must the storms be which compel a soul to seek for peace from the trigger of a pistol.

How much young power starves and pines away in a garret for want of a friend, for lack of a woman's consolation, in the midst of millions of fellow-creatures, in the presence of a listless crowd that is burdened by its wealth! When one remembers all this, suicide looms large. Between a self-sought death and the abundant hopes whose voices call a young man to Paris, God only knows what may intervene; what contending ideas have striven within the soul; what poems have been set aside; what moans and what despair have been repressed; what abortive masterpieces and vain endeavors! Every suicide is an awful poem of sorrow. Where will you find a work of genius floating above the seas of literature that can compare with this paragraph—"Yesterday, at four o'clock, a young woman threw herself into the Seine from the Pont des Arts"?

Dramas and romances pale before this concise Parisian phrase; so must even that old frontispiece, *The Lamentations of the glorious king of Kaërnavan, put in prison by his children*, the sole remaining fragment of a lost work that

drew tears from Sterne at the bare perusal—the same Sterne who deserted his own wife and family.

The stranger was beset with such thoughts as these, which passed in fragments through his mind, like tattered flags fluttering above the combat. If he set aside for a moment the burdens of consciousness and of memory, to watch the flower heads gently swayed by the breeze among the green thickets, a revulsion came over him, life struggled against the oppressive thought of suicide, and his eyes rose to the sky: gray clouds, melancholy gusts of the wind, the stormy atmosphere, all decreed that he should die.

He bent his way toward the Pont Royal, musing over the last fancies of others who had gone before him. He smiled to himself as he remembered that Lord Castlereagh had satisfied the humblest of our needs before he cut his throat, and that the academician Auger had sought for his snuff-box as he went to his death. He analyzed these extravagances, and even examined himself; for as he stood aside against the parapet to allow a porter to pass, his coat had been whitened somewhat by the contact, and he carefully brushed the dust from his sleeve, to his own surprise. He reached the middle of the arch, and looked forebodingly at the water.

"Wretched weather for drowning yourself," said a ragged old woman, who grinned at him; "isn't the Seine cold and dirty?"

His answer was a ready smile, which showed the frenzied nature of his courage; then he shivered all at once as he saw at a distance, by the door of the Tuileries, a shed with an inscription above it in letters twelve inches high: THE ROYAL HUMANE SOCIETY'S APPARATUS.

A vision of M. Dacheux rose before him, equipped by his philanthropy, calling out and setting in motion the too efficacious oars which break the heads of drowning men, if unluckily they should rise to the surface; he saw a curious crowd collecting, running for a doctor, preparing fumigations; he read the maundering paragraph in the papers, put

between notes on a festivity and on the smiles of a ballet-dancer; he heard the francs counted down by the prefect of police to the watermen. As a corpse, he was worth fifteen francs; but now while he lived he was only a man of talent without patrons, without friends, without a mattress to lie on, or any one to speak a word for him—a perfect social cipher, useless to a State which gave itself no trouble about him.

A death in broad daylight seemed degrading to him; he made up his mind to die at night so as to bequeath an unrecognizable corpse to a world which had disregarded the greatness of his life. He began his wanderings again, turning toward the Quai Voltaire, imitating the lagging gait of an idler seeking to kill time. As he came down the steps at the end of the bridge, his notice was attracted by the second-hand books displayed on the parapet, and he was on the point of bargaining for some. He smiled, thrust his hands philosophically into his pockets, and fell to strolling on again with a proud disdain in his manner, when he heard to his surprise some coin rattling fantastically in his pocket.

A smile of hope lighted his face, and slid from his lips over his features, over his brow, and brought a joyful light to his eyes and his dark cheeks. It was a spark of happiness like one of the red dots that flit over the remains of a burned scrap of paper; but as it is with the black ashes, so it was with his face, it became dull again when the stranger quickly drew out his hand and perceived three pennies. "Ah, kind gentleman! *carita, carita:* for the love of St. Catherine! only a halfpenny to buy some bread!"

A little chimney sweeper, with puffed cheeks, all black with soot, and clad in tatters, held out his hand to beg for the man's last pence.

Two paces from the little Savoyard stood an old *pauvre honteux*, sickly and feeble, in wretched garments of ragged druggeting, who asked in a thick, muffled voice—

"Anything you like to give, monsieur; I will pray to God for you . . ."

But the young man turned his eyes on him, and the old beggar stopped without another word, discerning in that mournful face an abandonment of wretchedness more bitter than his own.

"*La carita! la carita!*"

The stranger threw the coins to the old man and the child, left the footway, and turned toward the houses; the harrowing sight of the Seine fretted him beyond endurance.

"May God lengthen your days!" cried the two beggars.

As he reached the shop window of a print seller, this man on the brink of death met a young woman alighting from a showy carriage. He looked in delight at her prettiness, at the pale face appropriately framed by the satin of her fashionable bonnet. Her slender form and graceful movements entranced him. Her skirt had been slightly raised as she stepped to the pavement, disclosing a daintily fitting white stocking over the delicate outlines beneath. The young lady went into the shop, purchased albums and sets of lithographs; giving several gold coins for them, which glittered and rang upon the counter. The young man, seemingly occupied with the prints in the window, fixed upon the fair stranger a gaze as eager as man can give, to receive in exchange an indifferent glance, such as lights by accident on a passer-by. For him it was a leave-taking of love and of woman! but his final and strenuous questioning glance was neither understood nor felt by the slight-natured woman there; her color did not rise, her eyes did not droop. What was it to her? one more piece of adulation, yet another sigh only prompted the delightful thought at night, "I looked rather well to-day."

The young man quickly turned to another picture, and only left it when she returned to her carriage. The horses started off, the final vision of luxury and refinement went under an eclipse, just as that life of his would soon do also. Slowly and sadly he followed the line of the shops, listlessly examining the specimens on view. When the shops came to an end, he reviewed the Louvre, the Institute, the towers

of Notre Dame, of the Palais, the Pont des Arts; all these public monuments seemed to have taken their tone from the heavy gray sky.

Fitful gleams of light gave a foreboding look to Paris; like a pretty woman, the city has mysterious fits of ugliness or beauty. So the outer world seemed to be in a plot to steep this man about to die in a painful trance. A prey to the maleficent power which acts relaxingly upon us by the fluid circulating through our nerves, his whole frame seemed gradually to experience a dissolving process. He felt the anguish of these throes passing through him in waves, and the houses and the crowd seemed to surge to and fro in a mist before his eyes. He tried to escape the agitation wrought in his mind by the revulsions of his physical nature, and went toward the shop of a dealer in antiquities, thinking to give a treat to his senses, and to spend the interval till nightfall in bargaining over curiosities.

He sought, one might say, to regain courage and to find a stimulant, like a criminal who doubts his power to reach the scaffold. The consciousness of approaching death gave him, for the time being, the intrepidity of a duchess with a couple of lovers, so that he entered the place with an abstracted look, while his lips displayed a set smile like a drunkard's. Had not life, or rather had not death, intoxicated him? Dizziness soon overcame him again. Things appeared to him in strange colors, or as making slight movements; his irregular pulse was no doubt the cause; the blood that sometimes rushed like a burning torrent through his veins, and sometimes lay torpid and stagnant as tepid water. He merely asked leave to see if the shop contained any curiosities which he required.

A plump-faced young shopman with red hair, in an otter-skin cap, left an old peasant woman in charge of the shop—a sort of feminine Caliban, employed in cleaning a stove made marvellous by Bernard Palissy's work. This youth remarked carelessly—

"Look round, *monsieur!* We have nothing very remark-

able here downstairs; but if I may trouble you to go up to the first floor, I will show you some very fine mummies from Cairo, some inlaid pottery, and some carved ebony—*genuine Renaissance* work, just come in, and of perfect beauty."

In the stranger's fearful position this cicerone's prattle and shopman's empty talk seemed like the petty vexations by which narrow minds destroy a man of genius. But as he must even go through with it, he appeared to listen to his guide, answering him by gestures or monosyllables; but imperceptibly he arrogated the privilege of saying nothing, and gave himself up without hindrance to his closing meditations, which were appalling. He had a poet's temperament, his mind had entered by chance on a vast field; and he must see perforce the dry bones of twenty future worlds.

At a first glance the place presented a confused picture in which every achievement, human and divine, was mingled. Crocodiles, monkeys, and serpents stuffed with straw grinned at glass from church windows, seemed to wish to bite sculptured heads, to chase lacquered work, or to scramble up chandeliers. A Sèvres vase, bearing Napoleon's portrait by Mme. Jacotot, stood beside a sphinx dedicated to Sesostris. The beginnings of the world and the events of yesterday were mingled with grotesque cheerfulness. A kitchen jack leaned against a pyx, a republican sabre on a medieval hackbut. Mme. du Barry, with a star above her head, naked, and surrounded by a cloud, seemed to look longingly out of Latour's pastel at an Indian chibouk, while she tried to guess the purpose of the spiral curves that wound toward her. Instruments of death, poniards, curious pistols, and disguised weapons had been flung down pell-mell among the paraphernalia of daily life; porcelain tureens, Dresden plates, translucent cups from China, old salt-cellars, comfit-boxes belonging to feudal times. A carved ivory ship sped full sail on the back of a motionless tortoise.

The Emperor Augustus remained unmoved and imperial with an air-pump thrust into one eye. Portraits of French sheriffs and Dutch burgomasters, phlegmatic now as when

in life, looked down pallid and unconcerned on the chaos of past ages below them.

Every land of earth seemed to have contributed some stray fragment of its learning, some example of its art. Nothing seemed lacking to this philosophical kitchen-midden from a redskin's calumet, a green and golden slipper from the seraglio, a Moorish yataghan, a Tartar idol, to the soldier's tobacco pouch, to the priest's ciborium, and the plumes that once adorned a throne. This extraordinary combination was rendered yet more bizarre by the accidents of lighting, by a multitude of confused reflections of various hues, by the sharp contrast of blacks and whites. Broken cries seemed to reach the ear, unfinished dramas seized upon the imagination, smothered lights caught the eye. A thin coating of inevitable dust covered all the multitudinous corners and convolutions of these objects of various shapes which gave highly picturesque effects.

First of all, the stranger compared the three galleries which civilization, cults, divinities, masterpieces, dominions, carousals, sanity, and madness had filled to repletion, to a mirror with numerous facets, each depicting a world. After this first hazy idea he would fain have selected his pleasures; but by dint of using his eyes, thinking and musing, a fever began to possess him, caused perhaps by the gnawing pain of hunger. The spectacle of so much existence, individual or national, to which these pledges bore witness, ended by numbing his senses—the purpose with which he entered the shop was fulfilled. He had left the real behind, and had climbed gradually up to an ideal world; he had attained to the enchanted palace of ecstasy, whence the universe appeared to him by fragments and in shapes of flame, as once the future blazed out before the eyes of St. John in Patmos.

A crowd of sorrowing faces, beneficent and appalling, dark and luminous, far and near, gathered in numbers, in myriads, in whole generations. Egypt, rigid and mysterious, arose from her sands in the form of a mummy swathed

in black bandages; then the Pharaohs swallowed up nations, that they might build themselves a tomb; and he beheld Moses and the Hebrews and the desert, and a solemn antique world. Fresh and joyous, a marble statue spoke to him from a twisted column of the pleasure-loving myths of Greece and Ionia. Ah! who would not have smiled with him to see, against the earthen red background, the brown-faced maiden dancing with gleeful reverence before the god Priapus, wrought in the fine clay of an Etruscan vase? The Latin queen caressed her chimera.

The whims of Imperial Rome were there in life, the bath was disclosed, the toilet of a languid Julia, dreaming, waiting for her Tibullus. Strong with the might of Arabic spells, the head of Cicero evoked memories of a free Rome, and unrolled before him the scrolls of Titus Livius. The young man beheld *Senatus Populusque Romanus;* consuls, lictors, togas with purple fringes; the fighting in the Forum, the angry people, passed in review before him like the cloudy faces of a dream.

Then Christian Rome predominated in his vision. A painter had laid heaven open; he beheld the Virgin Mary wrapped in a golden cloud among the angels, shining more brightly than the sun, receiving the prayers of sufferers, on whom this second Eve Regenerate smiles pityingly. At the touch of a mosaic, made of various lavas from Vesuvius and Etna, his fancy fled to the hot tawny south of Italy. He was present at Borgia's orgies, he roved among the Abruzzi, sought for Italian love intrigues, grew ardent over pale faces and dark, almond-shaped eyes. He shivered over midnight adventures, cut short by the cool thrust of a jealous blade, as he saw a medieval dagger with a hilt wrought like lace, and spots of rust like splashes of blood upon it.

India and its religions took the shape of the idol with his peaked cap of fantastic form, with little bells, clad in silk and gold. Close by, a mat, as pretty as the bayadere who once lay upon it, still gave out a faint scent of sandal wood. His fancy was stirred by a goggle-eyed Chinese monster,

with mouth awry and twisted limbs, the invention of a people who, grown weary of the monotony of beauty, found an indescribable pleasure in an infinite variety of ugliness. A salt-cellar from Benvenuto Cellini's workshop carried him back to the Renaissance at its height, to the time when there was no restraint on art or morals, when torture was the sport of sovereigns; and from their councils, churchmen, with courtesans' arms about them, issued decrees of chastity for simple priests.

On a cameo he saw the conquests of Alexander, the massacres of Pizarro in a matchlock, and religious wars, disorderly, fanatical, and cruel, in the shadows of a helmet. Joyous pictures of chivalry were called up by a suit of Milanese armor, brightly polished and richly wrought; a paladin's eyes seemed to sparkle yet under the visor.

This sea of inventions, fashions, furniture, works of art and fiascos, made for him a poem without end. Shapes and colors and projects all lived again for him, but his mind received no clear and perfect conception. It was the poet's task to complete the sketches of the great master, who had scornfully mingled on his palette the hues of the numberless vicissitudes of human life. When the world at large at last released him, when he had pondered over many lands, many epochs, and various empires, the young man came back to the life of the individual. He impersonated fresh characters, and turned his mind to details, rejecting the life of nations as a burden too overwhelming for a single soul.

Yonder was a sleeping child modelled in wax, a relic of Ruysch's collection, an enchanting creation which brought back the happiness of his own childhood. The cotton garment of a Tahitian maid next fascinated him; he beheld the primitive life of nature, the real modesty of naked chastity, the joys of an idleness natural to mankind, a peaceful fate by a slow river of sweet water under a plantain tree that bears its pleasant manna without the toil of man. Then all at once he became a corsair, investing himself with the terrible poetry that Lara has given to the part: the thought came

at the sight of the mother-of-pearl tints of a myriad sea-shells, and grew as he saw madrepores redolent of the sea-weeds and the storms of the Atlantic.

The sea was forgotten again at a distant view of exquisite miniatures; he admired a precious missal in manuscript, adorned with arabesques in gold and blue. Thoughts of peaceful life swayed him; he devoted himself afresh to study and research, longing for the easy life of the monk, devoid alike of cares and pleasures; and from the depths of his cell he looked out upon the meadows, woods, and vineyards of his convent. Pausing before some work of Teniers, he took for his own the helmet of the soldier or the poverty of the artisan; he wished to wear a smoke-begrimed cap with these Flemings, to drink their beer and join their game at cards, and smiled upon the comely plumpness of a peasant woman. He shivered at a snowstorm by Mieris; he seemed to take part in Salvator Rosa's battle-piece; he ran his fingers over a tomahawk from Illinois, and felt his own hair rise as he touched a Cherokee scalping-knife. He marvelled over the rebec that he set in the hands of some lady of the land, drank in the musical notes of her ballad, and in the twilight by the Gothic arch above the hearth he told his love in a gloom so deep that he could not read his answer in her eyes.

He caught at all delights, at all sorrows; grasped at existence in every form; and endowed the phantoms conjured up from that inert and plastic material so liberally with his own life and feelings, that the sound of his own footsteps reached him as if from another world, or as the hum of Paris reaches the towers of Notre Dame.

He ascended the inner staircase which led to the first floor, with its votive shields, panoplies, carved shrines, and figures on the wall at every step. Haunted by the strangest shapes, by marvellous creations belonging to the borderland betwixt life and death, he walked as if under the spell of a dream. His own existence became a matter of doubt to him; he was neither wholly alive nor dead, like the curious ob-

jects about him. The light began to fade as he reached the show-rooms, but the treasures of gold and silver heaped up there scarcely seemed to need illumination from without. The most extravagant whims of prodigals, who have run through millions to perish in garrets, had left their traces here in this vast bazaar of human follies. Here, beside a writing-desk, made at the cost of 100,000 francs, and sold for a hundred pence, lay a lock with a secret worth a king's ransom. The human race was revealed in all the grandeur of its wretchedness; in all the splendor of its infinite littleness. An ebony table that an artist might worship, carved after Jean Goujon's designs, in years of toil, had been purchased perhaps at the price of firewood. Precious caskets, and things that fairy hands might have fashioned, lay there in heaps like rubbish.

"You must have the worth of millions here!" cried the young man as he entered the last of an immense suite of rooms, all decorated and gilt by eighteenth century artists.

"Thousands of millions, you might say," said the florid shopman; "but you have seen nothing as yet. Go up to the third floor, and you shall see!"

The stranger followed his guide to a fourth gallery, where one by one there passed before his wearied eyes several pictures by Poussin, a magnificent statue by Michelangelo, enchanting landscapes by Claude Lorraine, a Gerard Dow (like a stray page from Sterne), Rembrandts, Murillos, and pictures by Velasquez, as dark and full of color as a poem of Byron's; then came classic bass-reliefs, finely-cut agates, wonderful cameos! Works of art upon works of art, till the craftsman's skill palled on the mind; masterpiece after masterpiece, till art itself became hateful at last and enthusiasm died. He came upon a Madonna by Rafael, but he was tired of Rafael; a figure by Correggio never received the glance it demanded of him. A priceless vase of antique porphyry carved round about with pictures of the most grotesquely wanton of Roman divinities, the pride of some Corinna, scarcely drew a smile from him.

The ruins of fifteen hundred vanished years oppressed him; he sickened under all this human thought; felt bored by all this luxury and art. He struggled in vain against the constantly renewed fantastic shapes that sprang up from under his feet, like children of some sportive demon.

Are not fearful poisons set up in the soul by a swift concentration of all her energies, her enjoyments, or ideas; as modern chemistry, in its caprice, repeats the action of creation by some gas or other? Do not many men perish under the shock of the sudden expansion of some moral acid within them?

"What is there in that box?" he inquired, as he reached a large closet—final triumph of human skill, originality, wealth, and splendor, in which there hung a large, square mahogany coffer, suspended from a nail by a silver chain.

"Ah, *monsieur* keeps the key of it," said the stout assistant mysteriously. "If you wish to see the portrait, I will gladly venture to tell him."

"Venture!" said the young man; "then is your master a prince?"

"I don't know what he is," the other answered. Equally astonished, each looked for a moment at the other. Then construing the stranger's silence as an order, the apprentice left him alone in the closet.

Have you never launched into the immensity of time and space as you read the geological writings of Cuvier? Carried by his fancy, have you hung as if suspended by a magician's wand over the illimitable abyss of the past? When the fossil bones of animals belonging to civilizations before the Flood are turned up in bed after bed and layer upon layer of the quarries of Montmartre or among the schists of the Ural range, the soul receives with dismay a glimpse of millions of peoples forgotten by feeble human memory and unrecognized by permanent divine tradition, peoples whose ashes cover our globe with two feet of earth that yields bread to us and flowers.

Is not Cuvier the great poet of our era? Byron has given admirable expression to certain moral conflicts, but our immortal naturalist has reconstructed past worlds from a few bleached bones; has rebuilt cities, like Cadmus, with monsters' teeth; has animated forests with all the secrets of zoölogy gleaned from a piece of coal; has discovered a giant population from the footprints of a mammoth. These forms stand erect, grow large, and fill regions commensurate with their giant size. He treats figures like a poet; a naught set beside a seven by him produces awe.

He can call up nothingness before you without the phrases of a charlatan. He searches a lump of gypsum, finds an impression in it, says to you, "Behold!" All at once marble takes an animal shape, the dead come to life, the history of the world is laid open before you. After countless dynasties of giant creatures, races of fish and clans of mollusks, the race of man appears at last as the degenerate copy of a splendid model, which the Creator has perchance destroyed. Emboldened by his gaze into the past, this petty race, children of yesterday, can overstep chaos, can raise a psalm without end, and outline for themselves the story of the Universe in an Apocalypse that reveals the past. After the tremendous resurrection that took place at the voice of this man, the little drop in the nameless Infinite, common to all the spheres, that is ours to use, and that we call Time, seems to us a pitiable moment of life. We ask ourselves the purpose of our triumphs, our hatreds, our loves, overwhelmed as we are by the destruction of so many past universes, and whether it is worth while to accept the pain of life in order that hereafter we may become an intangible speck. Then we remain as if dead, completely torn away from the present till the *valet de chambre* comes in and says, "*Madame la Comtesse* answers that she is expecting *monsieur*."

All the wonders which had brought the known world before the young man's mind wrought in his soul much the same feeling of dejection that besets the philosopher investigating unknown creations. He longed more than ever for

death as he flung himself back in a curule chair and let his eyes wander across the illusions composing a panorama of the past. The pictures seemed to light up, the Virgin's heads smiled on him, the statues seemed alive. Everything danced and swayed around him, with a motion due to the gloom and the tormenting fever that racked his brain; each monstrosity grimaced at him, while the portraits on the canvas closed their eyes for a little relief. Every shape seemed to tremble and start, and to leave its place gravely or flippantly, gracefully or awkwardly, according to its fashion, character, and surroundings.

A mysterious Sabbath began, rivalling the fantastic scenes witnessed by Faust upon the Brocken. But these optical illusions, produced by weariness, overstrained eyesight, or the accidents of twilight, could not alarm the stranger. The terrors of life had no power over a soul grown familiar with the terrors of death. He even gave himself up, half amused by its bizarre eccentricities, to the influence of this moral galvanism; its phenomena, closely connected with his last thoughts, assured him that he was still alive. The silence about him was so deep that he embarked once more in dreams that grew gradually darker and darker as if by magic, as the light slowly faded. A last struggling ray from the sun lighted up rosy answering lights. He raised his head and saw a skeleton dimly visible, with its skull bent doubtfully to one side, as if to say, "The dead will none of thee as yet."

He passed his hand over his forehead to shake off the drowsiness, and felt a cold breath of air as an unknown furry something swept past his cheeks. He shivered. A muffled clatter of the windows followed; it was a bat, he fancied, that had given him this chilly sepulchral caress. He could yet dimly see for a moment the shapes that surrounded him, by the vague light in the west; then all these inanimate objects were blotted out in uniform darkness. Night and the hour of death had suddenly come. Thenceforward, for a while, he lost consciousness of the things

about him; he was either buried in deep meditation, or sleep overcame him, brought on by weariness or by the stress of those many thoughts that lacerated his heart.

Suddenly he thought that an awful voice called him by name; it was like some feverish nightmare, when at a step the dreamer falls headlong over into an abyss, and he trembled. He closed his eyes, dazzled by bright rays from a red circle of light that shone out from the shadows. In the midst of the circle stood a little old man who turned the light of a lamp upon him, yet he had not heard him enter, nor move, nor speak. There was something magical about the apparition. The boldest man, awakened in such a sort, would have felt alarm at the sight of this figure, which might indeed have issued from some sarcophagus hard by.

A curiously youthful look in the unmoving eyes of the spectre forbade the idea of anything supernatural; but for all that, in the brief space between his dreaming and waking life, the young man's judgment remained philosophically suspended, as Descartes advises. He was, in spite of himself, under the influence of an unaccountable hallucination, a mystery that our pride rejects, and that our imperfect science vainly tries to resolve.

Imagine a short old man, thin and spare, in a long black velvet gown girded round him by a thick silk cord. His long white hair escaped on either side of his face from under a black velvet cap which closely fitted his head and made a formal setting for his countenance. His gown enveloped his body like a winding-sheet, so that all that was left visible was a narrow bleached human face. But for the wasted arm, thin as a draper's wand, which held aloft the lamp that cast all its light upon him, the face would have seemed to hang in mid air. A gray pointed beard concealed the chin of this fantastical appearance, and gave him the look of one of those Jewish types which serve artists as models for Moses. His lips were so thin and colorless that it needed a close inspection to find the lines of his mouth at all in the pallid face.

His great wrinkled brow and hollow bloodless cheeks, the inexorably stern expression of his small green eyes that no longer possessed eyebrows or lashes, might have convinced the stranger that Gerard Dow's "Money Changer" had come down from his frame. The craftiness of an inquisitor, revealed in those curving wrinkles and creases that wound about his temples, indicated a profound knowledge of life. There was no deceiving this man, who seemed to possess a power of detecting the secrets of the wariest heart.

The wisdom and the moral codes of every people seemed gathered up in his passive face, just as all the productions of the globe had been heaped up in his dusty showrooms. He seemed to possess the tranquil luminous vision of some god before whom all things are open, or the haughty power of a man who knows all things.

With two strokes of the brush a painter could have so altered the expression of this face that what had been a serene representation of the Eternal Father should change to the sneering mask of a Mephistopheles; for though sovereign power was revealed by the forehead, mocking folds lurked about the mouth. He must have sacrificed all the joys of earth, as he had crushed all human sorrows beneath his potent will. The man at the brink of death shivered at the thought of the life led by this spirit, so solitary and remote from our world; joyless, since he had no one illusion left; painless, because pleasure had ceased to exist for him. There he stood, motionless and serene as a star in a bright mist. His lamp lighted up the obscure closet, just as his green eyes, with their quiet malevolence, seemed to shed a light on the moral world.

This was the strange spectacle that startled the young man's returning sight, as he shook off the dreamy fancies and thoughts of death that had lulled him. An instant of dismay, a momentary return to belief in nursery tales, may be forgiven him, seeing that his senses were obscured. Much thought had wearied his mind, and his nerves were exhausted

with the strain of the tremendous drama within him, and by the scenes that had heaped on him all the horrid pleasures that a piece of opium can produce.

But this apparition had appeared in Paris, on the Quai Voltaire, and in the nineteenth century; the time and place made sorcery impossible. The idol of French scepticism had died in the house just opposite, the disciple of Gay-Lussac and Arago, who had held the charlatanism of intellect in contempt. And yet the stranger submitted himself to the influence of an imaginative spell, as all of us do at times, when we wish to escape from an inevitable certainty, or to tempt the power of Providence. So some mysterious apprehension of a strange force made him tremble before the old man with the lamp. All of us have been stirred in the same way by the sight of Napoleon, or of some other great man, made illustrious by his genius or by fame.

"You wish to see Rafael's portrait of Jesus Christ, monsieur?" the old man asked politely. There was something metallic in the clear, sharp ring of his voice.

He set the lamp upon a broken column, so that all its light might fall on the brown case.

At the sacred names of Christ and Rafael the young man showed some curiosity. The merchant, who no doubt looked for this, pressed a spring, and suddenly the mahogany panel slid noiselessly back in its groove, and discovered the canvas to the stranger's admiring gaze. At sight of this deathless creation, he forgot his fancies in the show-rooms and the freaks of his dreams, and became himself again. The old man became a being of flesh and blood, very much alive, with nothing chimerical about him, and took up his existence at once upon solid earth.

The sympathy and love, and the gentle serenity in the divine face, exerted an instant sway over the younger spectator. Some influence falling from heaven bade cease the burning torment that consumed the marrow of his bones. The head of the Saviour of mankind seemed to issue from among the shadows represented by a dark background; an

aureole of light shone out brightly from his hair; an impassioned belief seemed to glow through him, and to thrill every feature. The word of life had just been uttered by those red lips, the sacred sounds seemed to linger still in the air; the spectator besought the silence for those captivating parables, hearkened for them in the future, and had to turn to the teachings of the past. The untroubled peace of the divine eyes, the comfort of sorrowing souls, seemed an interpretation of the Evangel. The sweet triumphant smile revealed the secret of the Catholic religion, which sums up all things in the precept, "Love one another." This picture breathed the spirit of prayer, enjoined forgiveness, overcame self, caused sleeping powers of good to waken. For this work of Rafael's had the imperious charm of music; you were brought under the spell of memories of the past; his triumph was so absolute that the artist was forgotten. The witchery of the lamplight heightened the wonder; the head seemed at times to flicker in the distance, enveloped in cloud.

"I covered the surface of that picture with gold pieces," said the merchant carelessly.

"And now for death!" cried the young man, awakened from his musings. His last thought had recalled his fate to him, as it led him imperceptibly back from the forlorn hopes to which he had clung.

"Ah, ha! then my suspicions were well founded!" said the other, and his hands held the young man's wrists in a grip like that of a vise.

The younger man smiled wearily at his mistake, and said gently—

"You, sir, have nothing to fear; it is not your life, but my own that is in question. . . . But why should I hide a harmless fraud?" he went on, after a look at the anxious old man. "I came to see your treasures to while away the time till night should come and I could drown myself decently. Who would grudge this last pleasure to a poet and a man of science?"

While he spoke, the jealous merchant watched the haggard face of his pretended customer with keen eyes. Perhaps the mournful tones of his voice reassured him, or he also read the dark signs of fate in the faded features that had made the gamblers shudder; he released his hands, but, with a touch of caution, due to the experience of some hundred years at least, he stretched his arm out to a sideboard as if to steady himself, took up a little dagger, and said—

"Have you been a supernumerary clerk of the Treasury for three years without receiving any perquisites?"

The stranger could scarcely suppress a smile as he shook his head.

"Perhaps your father has expressed his regret for your birth a little too sharply? Or have you disgraced yourself?"

"If I meant to be disgraced, I should live."

"You have been hissed perhaps at the Funambules? Or you have had to compose couplets to pay for your mistress's funeral? Do you want to be cured of the gold fever? Or to be quit of the spleen? For what blunder is your life a forfeit?"

"You must not look among the common motives that impel suicides for the reason of my death. To spare myself the task of disclosing my unheard-of sufferings, for which language has no name, I will tell you this—that I am in the deepest, most humiliating, and most cruel trouble, and," he went on in proud tones that harmonized ill with the words just uttered, "I have no wish to beg for either help or sympathy."

"Eh! eh!"

The two syllables which the old man pronounced resembled the sound of a rattle. Then he went on thus:

"Without compelling you to entreat me, without making you blush for it, and without giving you so much as a French centime, a para from the Levant, a German heller, a Russian kopeck, a Scottish farthing, a single obolus or sestercius

from the ancient world, or one piastre from the new, without offering you anything whatever in gold, or silver, or copper, notes or drafts, I will make you richer, more powerful, and of more consequence than a constitutional king."

The younger man thought that the older was in his dotage, and waited in bewilderment without venturing to reply.

"Turn round," said the merchant, suddenly catching up the lamp in order to light up the opposite wall; "look at that leathern skin," he went on.

The young man rose abruptly, and showed some surprise at the sight of a piece of shagreen which hung on the wall behind his chair. It was only about the size of a fox's skin, but it seemed to fill the deep shadows of the place with such brilliant rays that it looked like a small comet, an appearance at first sight inexplicable. The young sceptic went up to this so-called talisman, which was to rescue him from his woes, with a scoffing phrase in his thoughts. Still a harmless curiosity led him to bend over it and look at it from all points of view, and he soon found out the cause of its singular brilliancy. The dark grain of the leather had been so carefully burnished and polished, the striped markings of the graining were so sharp and clear, that every particle of the surface of the bit of Oriental leather was in itself a focus which concentrated the light, and reflected it vividly.

He accounted for this phenomenon categorically to the old man, who only smiled meaningly by way of answer. His superior smile led the young scientific man to fancy that he himself had been deceived by some imposture. He had no wish to carry one more puzzle to his grave, and hastily turned the skin over, like some child eager to find out the mysteries of a new toy.

"Ah," he cried, "here is the mark of the seal which they call in the East the Signet of Solomon."

"So you know that, then?" asked the merchant. His

peculiar method of laughter, two or three quick breathings through the nostrils, said more than any words however eloquent.

"Is there anybody in the world simple enough to believe in that idle fancy?" said the young man, nettled by the spitefulness of the silent chuckle. "Don't you know," he continued, "that the superstitions of the East have perpetuated the mystical form and the counterfeit characters of the symbol, which represents a mythical dominion? I have no more laid myself open to a charge of credulity in this case than if I had mentioned sphinxes or griffins, whose existence mythology in a manner admits."

"As you are an Orientalist," replied the other, "perhaps you can read that sentence."

He held the lamp close to the talisman, which the young man held toward him, and pointed out some characters inlaid in the surface of the wonderful skin, as if they had grown on the animal to which it once belonged.

"I must admit," said the stranger, "that I have no idea how the letters could be engraved so deeply on the skin of a wild ass."

And he turned quickly to the tables strewn with curiosities, and seemed to look for something.

"What is it that you want?" asked the old man.

"Something that will cut the leather, so that I can see whether the letters are printed or inlaid."

The old man held out his stiletto. The stranger took it and tried to cut the skin above the lettering; but when he had removed a thin shaving of leather from them, the characters still appeared below, so clear and so exactly like the surface impression, that for a moment he was not sure that he had cut anything away after all.

"The craftsmen of the Levant have secrets known only to themselves," he said, half in vexation, as he eyed the characters of this Oriental sentence.

"Yes," said the old man, "it is better to attribute it to man's agency than to God's."

The mysterious words were thus arranged:

لو ملكتنى ملكت آلكلّ
ولكن عمرك ملكى
واراد الله هكذا
اطلب وستنال مطالبك
ولكن قسن مطالبك على عمرك
وهى هاهنا
فبكل مرامك استنزل ايامك
أتريد نى
الله يحببك
آمين

Or, as it runs in English:

POSSESSING ME THOU SHALT POSSESS ALL THINGS.
BUT THY LIFE IS MINE, FOR GOD HAS SO WILLED IT.
WISH, AND THY WISHES SHALL BE FULFILLED;
BUT MEASURE THY DESIRES, ACCORDING
TO THE LIFE THAT IS IN THEE.
THIS IS THY LIFE,
WITH EACH WISH I MUST SHRINK
EVEN AS THY OWN DAYS.
WILT THOU HAVE ME? TAKE ME.
GOD WILL HEARKEN UNTO THEE.
SO BE IT!

"So you read Sanscrit fluently," said the old man. "You have been in Persia perhaps, or in Bengal?"

"No, sir," said the stranger; as he felt the emblematical skin curiously. It was almost as rigid as a sheet of metal.

The old merchant set the lamp back again upon the column, giving the other a look as he did so. "He has given

up the notion of dying already," the glance said with phlegmatic irony.

"Is it a jest, or is it an enigma?" asked the younger man.

The other shook his head and said soberly—

"I don't know how to answer you. I have offered this talisman with its terrible powers to men with more energy in them than you seem to me to have; but though they laughed at the questionable power it might exert over their futures, not one of them was ready to venture to conclude the fateful contract proposed by an unknown force. I am of their opinion, I have doubted and refrained, and—"

"Have you never even tried its power?" interrupted the young stranger.

"Tried it!" exclaimed the old man. "Suppose that you were on the column in the Place Vendôme, would you try flinging yourself into space? Is it possible to stay the course of life? Has a man ever been known to die by halves? Before you came here, you had made up your mind to kill yourself, but all at once a mystery fills your mind, and you think no more about death. You child! Does not any one day of your life afford mysteries more absorbing? Listen to me. I saw the licentious days of the Regency. I was like you, then, in poverty; I have begged my bread; but, for all that, I am now a centenarian with a couple of years to spare, and a millionnaire to boot. Misery was the making of me, ignorance has made me learned. I will tell you in a few words the great secret of human life. By two instinctive processes man exhausts the springs of life within him. Two verbs cover all the forms which these two causes of death may take—To Will and To have your Will. Between these two limits of human activity the wise have discovered an intermediate formula, to which I owe my good fortune and long life. To Will consumes us, and To have our Will destroys us, but To Know steeps our feeble organisms in perpetual calm. In me Thought has destroyed Will, so that Power is relegated to the ordinary functions of my economy. In a word, it is not in the heart which can be

broken, nor in the senses that become deadened, but it is in the brain that cannot waste away and survives everything else, that I have set my life. Moderation has kept mind and body unruffled. Yet, I have seen the whole world. I have learned all languages, lived after every manner. I have loaned a Chinaman money, taking his father's corpse as a pledge, slept in an Arab's tent on the security of his bare word, signed contracts in every capital of Europe, and left my gold without hesitation in savage wigwams. I have attained everything, because I have known how to despise all things.

"My one ambition has been to see. Is not Sight in a manner Insight? And to have knowledge or insight, is not that to have instinctive possession? To be able to discover the very substance of fact and to unite its essence to our essence? Of material possession what abides with you but an idea? Think, then, how glorious must be the life of a man who can stamp all realities upon his thought, place the springs of happiness within himself, and draw thence uncounted pleasures in idea, unsoiled by earthly stains. Thought is a key to all treasures; the miser's gains are ours without his cares. Thus I have soared above this world, where my enjoyments have been intellectual joys. I have revelled in the contemplation of seas, peoples, forests, and mountains! I have seen all things, calmly, and without weariness; I have set my desires on nothing; I have waited in expectation of everything. I have walked to and fro in the world as in a garden round about my own dwelling. Troubles, loves, ambitions, losses, and sorrows, as men call them, are for me ideas, which I transmute into waking dreams; I express and transpose instead of feeling them; instead of permitting them to prey upon my life, I dramatize and expand them; I divert myself with them as if they were romances which I could read by the power of vision within me. As I have never overtaxed my constitution, I still enjoy robust health; and as my mind is endowed with all the force that I have not wasted, this head of mine is even better furnished

than my galleries. The true millions lie here," he said, striking his forehead. "I spend delicious days in communings with the past; I summon before me whole countries, places, extents of sea, the fair faces of history. In my imaginary seraglio I have all the women I have never possessed. Your wars and revolutions come up before me for judgment. What is a feverish fugitive admiration for some more or less brightly colored piece of flesh and blood; some more or less rounded human form; what are all the disasters that wait on your erratic whims, compared with the magnificent power of conjuring up the whole world within your soul, compared with the immeasurable joys of movement, unstrangled by the cords of time, unclogged by the fetters of space; the joys of beholding all things, of comprehending all things, of leaning over the parapet of the world to question the other spheres, to hearken to the voice of God? There," he burst out, vehemently, "there are To Will and To have your Will, both together," he pointed to the bit of shagreen; "there are your social ideas, your immoderate desires, your excesses, your pleasures that end in death, your sorrows that quicken the pace of life, for pain is perhaps but a violent pleasure. Who could determine the point where pleasure becomes pain, where pain is still a pleasure? Is not the utmost brightness of the ideal world soothing to us, while the lightest shadows of the physical world annoy? Is not knowledge the secret of wisdom? And what is folly but a riotous expenditure of Will or Power?"

"Very good, then, a life of riotous excess for me!" said the stranger, pouncing upon the piece of shagreen.

"Young man, beware!" cried the other with incredible vehemence.

"I had resolved my existence into thought and study," the stranger replied; "and yet they have not even supported me. I am not to be gulled by a sermon worthy of Swedenborg, nor by your Oriental amulet, nor yet by your charitable endeavors to keep me in a world wherein existence is no longer possible for me. . . . Let me see now," he

added, clutching the talisman convulsively, as he looked at the old man, "I wish for a royal banquet, a carouse worthy of this century, which, it is said, has brought everything to perfection! Let me have young boon companions, witty, unwarped by prejudice, merry to the verge of madness! Let one wine succeed another, each more biting and perfumed than the last, and strong enough to bring about three days of delirium! Passionate women's forms should grace that night! I would be borne away to unknown regions beyond the confines of this world, by the car and four-winged steeds of a frantic and uproarious orgy. Let us ascend to the skies, or plunge ourselves in the mire. I do not know if one soars or sinks at such moments, and I do not care! Next, I bid this enigmatical power to concentrate all delights for me in one single joy. Yes, I must comprehend every pleasure of earth and heaven in the final embrace that is to kill me. Therefore, after the wine, I wish to hold high festival to Priapus, with songs that might rouse the dead, and kisses without end; the sound of them should pass like the crackling of flame through Paris, should revive the heat of youth and passion in husband and wife, even in hearts of seventy years."

A laugh burst from the little old man. It rang in the young man's ears like an echo from hell, and tyrannously cut him short. He said no more.

"Do you imagine that my floors are going to open suddenly, so that luxuriously-appointed tables may rise through them, and guests from another world? No, no, young madcap. You have entered into the compact now, and there is an end of it. Henceforward, your wishes will be accurately fulfilled, but at the expense of your life. The compass of your days, visible in that skin, will contract according to the strength and number of your desires, from the least to the most extravagant. The Brahmin from whom I had this skin once explained to me that it would bring about a mysterious connection between the fortunes and the wishes of its possessor. Your first wish is a vulgar one, which I

could fulfil, but I leave that to the issues of your new existence. After all, you were wishing to die; very well, your suicide is only put off for a time."

The stranger was surprised and irritated that this peculiar old man persisted in not taking him seriously. A half philanthropic intention peeped so clearly forth from his last jesting observation that he exclaimed—

"I shall soon see, sir, if any change comes over my fortunes in the time it will take to cross the width of the quay. But I should like us to be quits for such a momentous service; that is, if you are not laughing at an unlucky wretch, so I wish that you may fall in love with an opera-dancer. You would understand the pleasures of intemperance then, and might perhaps grow lavish of the wealth that you have husbanded so philosophically."

He went out without heeding the old man's heavy sigh, went back through the galleries and down the staircase, followed by the stout assistant who vainly tried to light his passage; he fled with the haste of a robber caught in the act. Blinded by a kind of delirium, he did not even notice the unexpected flexibility of the piece of shagreen, which coiled itself up, pliant as a glove in his excited fingers, till it would go into the pocket of his coat, where he mechanically thrust it. As he rushed out of the door into the street, he ran up against three young men who were passing arm in arm.

"Brute!"

"Idiot!"

Such were the gratifying expressions exchanged between them.

"Why, it is Raphael!"

"Good! we were looking for you."

"What! it is you, then?"

These three friendly exclamations quickly followed the insults, as the light of a street lamp, flickering in the wind, fell upon the astonished faces of the group.

"My dear fellow, you must come with us!" said the young man that Raphael had all but knocked down.

"What is all this about?"

"Come along, and I will tell you the history of it as we go."

By fair means or foul, Raphael must go along with his friends toward the Pont des Arts; they surrounded him, and linked him by the arm among their merry band.

"We have been after you for about a week," the speaker went on. "At your respectable hotel de Saint Quentin, where, by the way, the sign with the alternate black and red letters cannot be removed, and hangs out just as it did in the time of Jean Jacques, that Leonarda of yours told us that you were off into the country. For all that, we certainly did not look like duns, creditors, sheriff's officers, or the like. But no matter! Rastignac had seen you the evening before at the Bouffons; we took courage again, and made it a point of honor to find out whether you were roosting in a tree in the Champs-Elysées, or in one of those philanthropic abodes where the beggars sleep on a twopenny rope, or if, more lucky, you were bivouacking in some boudoir or other. We could not find you anywhere. Your name was not in the jailer's registers at St. Pelagie nor at La Force! Government departments, cafés, libraries, lists of prefects' names, newspaper offices, restaurants, greenrooms—to cut it short, every lurking place in Paris, good or bad, has been explored in the most expert manner. We bewailed the loss of a man endowed with such genius that one might look to find him either at Court or in the common jails. We talked of canonizing you as a hero of July, and, upon my word, we regretted you!"

As he spoke, the friends were crossing the Pont des Arts. Without listening to them, Raphael looked at the Seine, at the clamoring waves that reflected the lights of Paris. Above that river, in which but now he had thought to fling himself, the old man's prediction had been fulfilled, the hour of his death had been already put back by fate.

"We really regretted you," said his friend, still pursu-

ing his theme. "It was a question of a plan in which we included you as a superior person, that is to say, somebody who can put himself above other people. The constitutional thimble-rig is carried on to-day, dear boy, more seriously than ever. The infamous monarchy, displaced by the heroism of the people, was a sort of drab, you could laugh and revel with her; but La Patrie is a shrewish and virtuous wife, and willy-nilly you must take her prescribed endearments. Then besides, as you know, authority passed over from the Tuileries to the journalists, at the time when the Budget changed its quarters and went from the Faubourg Saint Germain to the Chaussée d'Antin. But this you may not know perhaps. The Government, that is, the aristocracy of lawyers and bankers who represent the country to-day, just as the priests used to do in the time of the monarchy, has felt the necessity of mystifying the worthy people of France with a few new words and old ideas, like philosophers of every school, and all strong intellects ever since time began. So now Royalist-national ideas must be inculcated, by proving to us that it is far better to pay twelve hundred million francs thirty-three centimes to La Patrie, represented by Messieurs Such-and-Such, than to pay eleven hundred million francs nine centimes to a king who used to say *I* instead of *we*. In a word, a journal, with two or three hundred thousand francs, good, at the back of it, has just been started, with a view to making an opposition paper to content the discontented, without prejudice to the national government of the citizen-king. We scoff at liberty as at despotism now, and at religion or incredulity quite impartially. And since, for us, 'our country' means a capital where ideas circulate and are sold at so much a line, a succulent dinner every day, and the play at frequent intervals, where profligate women swarm, where suppers last on into the next day, and light loves are hired by the hour like cabs; and since Paris will always be the most adorable of all countries, the country of joy, liberty, wit, pretty women, *mauvais sujets*, and good wine; where the truncheon of au-

thority never makes itself disagreeably felt, because one is so close to those who wield it—we, therefore, sectaries of the god Mephistopheles, have engaged to whitewash the public mind, to give fresh costumes to the actors, to put a new plank or two in the government booth, to doctor doctrinaires, and warm up old Republicans, to touch up the Bonapartists a bit, and revictual the Centre; provided that we are allowed to laugh *in petto* at both kings and peoples, to think one thing in the morning and another at night, and to lead a merry life *à la* Panurge, or to recline upon soft cushions, *more orientali.*

"The sceptre of this burlesque and macaronic kingdom," he went on, "we have reserved for you; so we are taking you straightway to a dinner given by the founder of the said newspaper, a retired banker, who, at a loss to know what to do with his money, is going to buy some brains with it. You will be welcomed as a brother, we shall hail you as king of these free lances who will undertake anything; whose perspicacity discovers the intentions of Austria, England, or Russia before either Russia, Austria, or England have formed any. Yes, we will invest you with the sovereignty of those puissant intellects which give to the world its Mirabeaus, Talleyrands, Pitts, and Metternichs—all the clever Crispins who treat the destinies of a kingdom as gamblers' stakes, just as ordinary men play dominos for *kirschenwasser.* We have given you out to be the most undaunted champion who ever wrestled in a drinking-bout at close quarters with the monster called Carousal, whom all bold spirits wish to try a fall with; we have gone so far as to say that you have never yet been worsted. I hope you will not make liars of us. Taillefer, our amphitryon, has undertaken to surpass the circumscribed saturnalias of the petty modern Lucullus. He is rich enough to infuse pomp into trifles, and style and charm into dissipation. . . . Are you listening, Raphael?" asked the orator, interrupting himself.

"Yes," answered the young man, less surprised by the

accomplishment of his wishes than by the natural manner in which the events had come about.

He could not bring himself to believe in magic, but he marvelled at the accidents of human fate.

"Yes, you say, just as if you were thinking of your grandfather's demise," remarked one of his neighbors.

"Ah!" cried Raphael, "I was thinking, my friends, that we are in a fair way to become very great scoundrels," and there was an ingenuousness in his tones that set these writers, the hope of young France, in a roar. "So far our blasphemies have been uttered over our cups; we have passed our judgments on life while drunk, and taken men and affairs in an after-dinner frame of mind. We were innocent of action; we were bold in words. But now we are to be branded with the hot iron of politics; we are going to enter the convict's prison and to drop our illusions. Although one has no belief left, except in the devil, one may regret the paradise of one's youth and the age of innocence, when we devoutly offered the tip of our tongue to some good priest for the consecrated wafer of the sacrament. Ah, my good friends, our first peccadilloes gave us so much pleasure because the consequent remorse set them off and lent a keen relish to them; but nowadays—"

"Oh! now," said the first speaker, "there is still left—"

"What?" asked another.

"Crime—"

"There is a word as high as the gallows and deeper than the Seine," said Raphael.

"Oh, you don't understand me; I mean political crime. Since this morning, a conspirator's life is the only one I covet. I don't know that the fancy will last over to-morrow, but to-night at least my gorge rises at the anæmic life of our civilization and its railroad evenness. I am seized with a passion for the miseries of the retreat from Moscow, for the excitements of the Red Corsair, or for a smuggler's life. I should like to go to Botany Bay, as we have no Chartreux left us here in France; it is a sort of infirmary

Gardner Wa... 31530

reserved for little Lord Byrons who, having crumpled up their lives like a serviette after dinner, have nothing left to do but to set their country ablaze, blow their own brains out, plot for a republic, or clamor for a war—"

"Emile," Raphael's neighbor called eagerly to the speaker, "on my honor, but for the revolution of July I would have taken orders, and gone off down into the country somewhere to lead the life of an animal, and—"

"And you would have read your Breviary through every day."

"Yes."

"You are a coxcomb!"

"Why, we read the newspapers as it is!"

"Not bad that, for a journalist! But hold your tongue, we are going through a crowd of subscribers. Journalism, look you, is the religion of modern society, and has even gone a little further."

"What do you mean?"

"Its pontiffs are not obliged to believe in it any more than the people are."

Chatting thus, like good fellows who have known their *De Viris illustribus* for years past, they reached a mansion in the Rue Joubert.

Emile was a journalist who had acquired more reputation by dint of doing nothing than others had derived from their achievements. A bold, caustic, and powerful critic, he possessed all the qualities that his defects permitted. An outspoken giber, he made numberless epigrams on a friend to his face; but would defend him, if absent, with courage and loyalty. He laughed at everything, even at his own career. Always impecunious, he yet lived, like all men of his calibre, plunged in unspeakable indolence. He would fling some word containing whole volumes in the teeth of folk who could not put a syllable of sense into their books. He lavished promises that he never fulfilled; he made a pillow of his luck and reputation, on which he slept, and ran the risk of waking up to old age in a workhouse. A steadfast friend

to the gallows foot, a cynical swaggerer with a child's simplicity, a worker only from necessity or caprice.

"In the language of Maître Alcofribas, we are about to make a famous *tronçon de chière lie*," he remarked to Raphael as he pointed out the flower-stands that made a perfumed forest of the staircase.

"I like a vestibule to be well warmed and richly carpeted," Raphael said. "Luxury in the peristyle is not common in France. I feel as if life had begun anew here."

"And up above we are going to drink and make merry once more, my dear Raphael. Ah! yes," he went on, "and I hope we are going to come off conquerors, too, and walk over everybody else's head."

As he spoke, he jestingly pointed to the guests. They were entering a large room which shone with gilding and lights, and there all the younger men of note in Paris welcomed them. Here was one who had just revealed fresh powers; his first picture vied with the glories of Imperial art. There, another, who but yesterday had launched forth a volume, an acrid book filled with a sort of literary arrogance, which opened up new ways to the modern school. A sculptor, not far away, with vigorous power visible in his rough features, was chatting with one of those unenthusiastic scoffers who can either see excellence anywhere or nowhere, as it happens. Here, the cleverest of our caricaturists, with mischievous eyes and bitter tongue, lay in wait for epigrams to translate into pencil strokes; there, stood the young and audacious writer, who distilled the quintessence of political ideas better than any other man, or compressed the work of some prolific writer as he held him up to ridicule; he was talking with the poet whose works would have eclipsed all the writings of the time if his ability had been as strenuous as his hatreds. Both were trying not to say the truth while they kept clear of lies, as they exchanged flattering speeches. A famous musician administered soothing consolation, in a rallying fashion, to a young politician who had just fallen, quite unhurt, from his rostrum. Young

writers who lacked style stood beside other young writers who lacked ideas, and authors of poetical prose by prosaic poets.

At the sight of all these incomplete beings, a simple Saint Simonian, ingenuous enough to believe in his own doctrine, charitably paired them off, designing, no doubt, to convert them into monks of his order. A few men of science mingled in the conversation, like nitrogen in the atmosphere, and several *vaudevillistes* shed rays like the sparkling diamonds that give neither light nor heat. A few paradox-mongers, laughing up their sleeves at any folk who embraced their likes or dislikes in men or affairs, had already begun a two-edged policy, conspiring against all systems, without committing themselves to any side. Then there was the self-appointed critic who admires nothing, and will blow his nose in the middle of a *cavatina* at the Bouffons, who applauds before any one else begins, and contradicts every one who says what he himself was about to say; he was there giving out the sayings of wittier men for his own. Of all the assembled guests, a future lay before some five; ten or so should acquire a fleeting renown; as for the rest, like all mediocrities, they might apply to themselves the famous falsehood of Louis XVIII., Union and oblivion.

The anxious jocularity of a man who is expending two thousand crowns sat on their host. His eyes turned impatiently toward the door from time to time, seeking one of his guests who kept him waiting. Very soon a stout little person appeared, who was greeted by a complimentary murmur; it was the notary who had invented the newspaper that very morning. A valet-de-chambre in black opened the doors of a vast dining-room, whither every one went without ceremony, and took his place at an enormous table.

Raphael took a last look round the room before he left it. His wish had been realized to the full. The rooms were adorned with silk and gold. Countless wax tapers set in handsome candelabra lighted up the slightest details of gilded friezes, the delicate bronze sculpture, and the splen-

did colors of the furniture. The sweet scent of rare flowers, set in stands tastefully made of bamboo, filled the air. Everything, even the curtains, was pervaded by elegance without pretension, and there was a certain imaginative charm about it all which acted like a spell on the mind of a needy man.

"An income of a hundred thousand livres a year is a very nice beginning of the catechism, and a wonderful assistance to putting morality into our actions," he said, sighing. "Truly my sort of virtue can scarcely go afoot, and vice means, to my thinking, a garret, a threadbare coat, a gray hat in winter time, and sums owing to the porter. . . . I should like to live in the lap of luxury a year, or six months, no matter! And then afterward, die. I should have known, exhausted, and consumed a thousand lives, at any rate."

"Why, you are taking the tone of a stockbroker in good luck," said Emile, who overheard him. "Pooh! your riches would be a burden to you as soon as you found that they would spoil your chances of coming out above the rest of us. Hasn't the artist always kept the balance true between the poverty of riches and the riches of poverty? And isn't struggle a necessity to some of us? Look out for your digestion, and only look," he added, with a mock-heroic gesture, "at the majestic, thrice holy, and edifying appearance of this amiable capitalist's dining-room. That man has in reality only made his money for our benefit. Isn't he a kind of sponge of the polyp order, overlooked by naturalists, which should be carefully squeezed before he is left for his heirs to feed upon? There is style, isn't there, about those bass-reliefs that adorn the walls? And the lustres, and the pictures, what luxury well carried out! If one may believe those who envy him, or who know, or think they know, the origins of his life, then this man got rid of a German and some others—his best friend for one, and the mother of that friend, during the Revolution. Could you house crimes under the venerable Taillefer's silvering locks? He looks to me a very worthy man. Only see how the silver sparkles, and is every glittering ray like the stab of a dagger to him?

. . . Let us go in, one might as well believe in Mahomet. If common report speak truth, here are thirty men of talent, and good fellows too, prepared to dine off the flesh and blood of a whole family; . . . and here are we ourselves, a pair of youngsters full of open-hearted enthusiasm, and we shall be partakers in his guilt. I have a mind to ask our capitalist whether he is a respectable character. . . . "

"No, not now," cried Raphael, "but when he is dead drunk, we shall have had our dinner then."

The two friends sat down laughing. First of all, by a glance more rapid than a word, each paid his tribute of admiration to the splendid general effect of the long table, white as a bank of freshly-fallen snow, with its symmetrical line of covers, crowned with their pale golden rolls of bread. Rainbow colors gleamed in the starry rays of light reflected by the glass; the lights of the tapers crossed and recrossed each other indefinitely; the dishes covered with their silver domes whetted both appetite and curiosity.

Few words were spoken. Neighbors exchanged glances as the Madeira circulated. Then the first course appeared in all its glory; it would have done honor to the late Cambacérès, Brillat-Savarin would have celebrated it. The wines of Bordeaux and Burgundy, white and red, were royally lavished. This first part of the banquet might have been compared in every way to a rendering of some classical tragedy. The second act grew a trifle noisier. Every guest had had a fair amount to drink, and had tried various *crûs* at his pleasure, so that as the remains of the magnificent first course were removed, tumultuous discussions began; a pale brow here and there began to flush, sundry noses took a purpler hue, faces lighted up, and eyes sparkled.

While intoxication was only dawning, the conversation did not overstep the bounds of civility; but banter and *bon mots* slipped by degrees from every tongue; and then slander began to rear its little snake's head, and spoke in dulcet tones; a few shrewd ones here and there gave heed to it, hoping to keep their heads. So the second course found their minds

somewhat heated. Every one ate as he spoke, spoke while he ate, and drank without heeding the quantity of the liquor, the wine was so biting, the bouquet so fragrant, the example around so infectious. Taillefer made a point of stimulating his guests, and plied them with the formidable wines of the Rhone, with fierce Tokay, and heady old Roussillon.

The champagne, impatiently expected and lavishly poured out, was a scourge of fiery sparks to these men, released like post-horses from some mail-coach by a relay; they let their spirits gallop away into the wilds of argument to which no one listened, began to tell stories which had no auditors, and repeatedly asked questions to which no answer was made. Only the loud voice of wassail could be heard, a voice made up of a hundred confused clamors, which rose and grew like a *crescendo* of Rossini's. Insidious toasts, swagger, and challenges followed.

Each renounced any pride in his own intellectual capacity, in order to vindicate that of hogsheads, casks, and vats; and each made noise enough for two. A time came when the footmen smiled, while their masters all talked at once. A philosopher would have been interested, doubtless, by the singularity of the thoughts expressed, a politician would have been amazed by the incongruity of the methods discussed in that melée of words or doubtfully luminous paradoxes, where truths, grotesquely caparisoned, met in conflict across the uproar of brawling judgments, of arbitrary decisions and folly, much as bullets, shells, and grapeshot are hurled across a battlefield.

It was at once a volume and a picture. Every philosophy, religion, and moral code differing so greatly in every latitude, every government, every great achievement of the human intellect fell before a scythe as long as Time's own; and you might have found it hard to decide whether it was wielded by Gravity intoxicated, or by Inebriation grown sober and clear-sighted. Borne away by a kind of tempest, their minds, like the sea raging against the cliffs, seemed ready to shake the laws which confine the ebb and flow of

civilizations; unconsciously fulfilling the will of God, who has suffered evil and good to abide in nature, and reserved the secret of their continual strife to Himself. A frantic travesty of debate ensued, a Walpurgis-revel of intellects. Between the dreary jests of these children of the Revolution over the inauguration of a newspaper, and the talk of the joyous gossips at Gargantua's birth, stretched the gulf that divides the nineteenth century from the sixteenth. Laughingly they had begun the work of destruction, and our journalists laughed amid the ruins.

"What is the name of that young man over there?" said the notary, indicating Raphael. "I thought I heard some one call him Valentin."

"What stuff is this?" said Emile, laughing; "plain Valentin, say you? Raphael *de* Valentin, if you please. We bear an eagle or, on a field sable, with a silver crown, beak, and claws gules, and a fine motto: NON CECIDIT ANIMUS. We are no foundling child, but a descendant of the Emperor Valens, of the stock of the Valentinois, founders of the cities of Valence in France and Valencia in Spain, rightful heirs to the Empire of the East. If we suffer Mahmoud on the throne of Byzantium, it is out of pure condescension, and for lack of funds and soldiers."

With a fork flourished above Raphael's head, Emile outlined a crown upon it. The notary bethought himself a moment, but soon fell to drinking again, with a gesture peculiar to himself; it was quite impossible, it seemed to say, to secure in his clientèle the cities of Valence and Byzantium, the Emperor Valens, Mahmoud, and the house of Valentinois.

"Should not the destruction of those ant-hills, Babylon, Tyre, Carthage, and Venice, each crushed beneath the foot of a passing giant, serve as a warning to man, vouchsafed by some mocking power?" said Claude Vignon, who must play the Bossuet, as a sort of purchased slave, at the rate of fivepence a line.

"Perhaps Moses, Sylla, Louis XI., Richelieu, Robespierre, and Napoléon were but the same man who crosses

our civilizations now and again, like a comet across the sky," said a disciple of Ballanche.

"Why try to fathom the designs of Providence?" said Canalis, maker of ballads.

"Come, now," said the man who set up for a critic, "there is nothing more elastic in the world than your Providence."

"Well, sir, Louis XIV. sacrificed more lives over digging the foundations of the Maintenon's aqueducts than the Convention expended in order to assess the taxes justly, to make one law for everybody, and one nation of France, and to establish the rule of equal inheritance," said Massol, whom the lack of a syllable before his name had made a Republican.

"Are you going to leave our heads on our shoulders?" asked Moreau (of the Oise), a substantial farmer. "You, sir, who took blood for wine just now?"

"Where is the use? Aren't the principles of social order worth some sacrifices, sir?"

"Hi! Bixiou! What's-his-name, the Republican, considers a landowner's head a sacrifice!" said a young man to his neighbor.

"Men and events count for nothing," said the Republican, following out his theory in spite of hiccoughs; "in politics, as in philosophy, there are only principles and ideas."

"What an abomination! Then you would ruthlessly put your friends to death for a shibboleth?"

"Eh, sir! the man who feels compunction is your thorough scoundrel, for he has some notion of virtue; while Peter the Great and the Duke of Alva were embodied systems, and the pirate Monbard an organization."

"But can't Society rid itself of your systems and organizations?" said Canalis.

"Oh, granted!" cried the Republican.

"That stupid Republic of yours makes me feel queasy. We shan't be able to carve a capon in peace, because we shall find the agrarian law inside it."

"Ah, my little Brutus, stuffed with truffles, your principles are all right enough. But you are like my valet, the rogue is so frightfully possessed with a mania for property that if I left him to clean my clothes after his fashion, he would soon clean me out."

"Crass idiots!" replied the Republican, "you are for setting a nation straight with toothpicks. To your way of thinking, justice is more dangerous than thieves."

"Oh, dear!" cried the attorney Desroches.

"Aren't they a bore with their politics!" said the notary Cardot. "Shut up. That's enough of it. There is no knowledge nor virtue worth shedding a drop of blood for. If Truth were brought into liquidation, we might find her insolent."

"It would be much less trouble, no doubt, to amuse ourselves with evil, rather than dispute about good. Moreover, I would give all the speeches made for forty years past at the Tribune for a trout, for one of Perrault's tales or Charlet's sketches."

"Quite right! . . . Hand me the asparagus. Because, after all, liberty begets anarchy, anarchy leads to despotism, and despotism back again to liberty. Millions have died without securing a triumph for any one system. Is not that the vicious circle in which the whole moral world revolves? Man believes that he has reached perfection, when in fact he has but rearranged matters."

"Oh! oh!" cried Cursy, the *vaudevilliste;* "in that case, gentlemen, here's to Charles X., the father of liberty."

"Why not?" asked Emile. "When law becomes despotic, morals are relaxed, and *vice versa.*"

"Let us drink to the imbecility of authority, which gives us such an authority over imbeciles!" said the banker.

"Napoleon left us glory, at any rate, my good friend!" exclaimed a naval officer who had never left Brest.

"Glory is a poor bargain; you buy it dear, and it will not keep. Does not the egotism of the great take the form of glory, just as for nobodies it is their own well-being?"

"You are very fortunate, sir—"

"The first inventor of ditches must have been a weakling, for society is only useful to the puny. The savage and the philosopher, at either extreme of the moral scale, hold property in equal horror."

"All very fine!" said Cardot; "but if there were no property, there would be no documents to draw up."

"These green peas are excessively delicious!"

"And the *curé* was found dead in his bed in the morning. . . ."

"Who is talking about death? Pray don't trifle, I have an uncle."

"Could you bear his loss with resignation?"

"No question."

"Gentlemen, listen to me! HOW TO KILL AN UNCLE. Silence! (Cries of 'Hush! hush!') In the first place, take an uncle, large and stout, seventy years old at least, they are the best uncles. (Sensation.) Get him to eat a *pâte de foie gras*, any pretext will do."

"Ah, but my uncle is a thin, tall man, and very niggardly and abstemious."

"That sort of uncle is a monster; he misappropriates existence."

"Then," the speaker on uncles went on, "tell him, while he is digesting it, that his banker has failed."

"How if he bears up?"

"Let loose a pretty girl on him."

"And if—?" asked the other, with a shake of the head.

"Then he wouldn't be an uncle—an uncle is a gay dog by nature."

"Malibran has lost two notes in her voice."

"No, sir, she has not."

"Yes, sir, she has."

"Oh, ho! No and yes, is not that the sum-up of all religious, political, or literary dissertations? Man is a clown dancing on the edge of an abyss."

"You would make out that I am a fool."

"On the contrary, you cannot make me out."

"Education, there's a pretty piece of tomfoolery. M. Heineffettermach estimates the number of printed volumes at more than a thousand millions; and a man cannot read more than a hundred and fifty thousand in his lifetime. So, just tell me what that word *education* means. For some it consists in knowing the names of Alexander's horse, of the dog Bérécillo, of the Seigneur d'Accords, and in ignorance of the man to whom we owe the discovery of rafting and the manufacture of porcelain. For others it is the knowledge how to burn a will and live respected, be looked up to and popular, instead of stealing a watch with half a dozen aggravating circumstances, after a previous conviction, and so perishing, hated and dishonored, in the Place de Grève."

"Will Nathan's work live?"

"He has very clever collaborators, sir."

"Or Canalis?"

"He is a great man; let us say no more about him."

"You are all drunk!"

"The consequence of a Constitution is the immediate stultification of intellects. Art, science, public works, everything, is consumed by a horribly egoistic feeling, the leprosy of the time. Three hundred of your bourgeoisie, set down on benches, will only think of planting poplars. Tyranny does great things lawlessly, while Liberty will scarcely trouble herself to do petty ones lawfully."

"Your reciprocal instruction will turn out counters in human flesh," broke in an Absolutist. "All individuality will disappear in a people brought to a dead level by education."

"For all that, is not the aim of society to secure happiness to each member of it?" asked the Saint-Simonian.

"If you had an income of fifty thousand livres, you would not think much about the people. If you are smitten with a tender passion for the race, go to Madagascar; there you will find a nice little nation all ready to Saint-Simonize, classify, and cork up in your phials, but here

every one fits into his niche like a peg in a hole. A porter is a porter, and a blockhead is a fool, without a college of fathers to promote them to those positions."

"You are a Carlist."

"And why not? Despotism pleases me; it implies a certain contempt for the human race. I have no animosity against kings, they are so amusing. Is it nothing to sit enthroned in a room, at a distance of thirty million leagues from the sun?"

"Let us once more take a broad view of civilization," said the man of learning who, for the benefit of the inattentive sculptor, had opened a discussion on primitive society and autochthonous races. "The vigor of a nation in its origin was in a way physical, unitary, and crude; then as aggregations increased, government advanced by a decomposition of the primitive rule, more or less skilfully managed. For example, in remote ages national strength lay in theocracy, the priest held both sword and censer; a little later there were two priests, the pontiff and the king. To-day our society, the latest word of civilization, has distributed power according to the number of combinations, and we come to the forces called business, thought, money, and eloquence. Authority thus divided is steadily approaching a social dissolution, with interest as its one opposing barrier. We depend no longer on either religion or physical force, but upon intellect. Can a book replace the sword? Can discussion be a substitute for action? That is the question."

"Intellect has made an end of everything," cried the Carlist. "Come, now! Absolute freedom has brought about national suicides; their triumph left them as listless as an English millionnaire."

"Won't you tell us something new? You have made fun of authority of all sorts to-day, which is every bit as vulgar as denying the existence of God. So you have no belief left, and the century is like an old Sultan worn out by debauchery! Your Byron, in short, sings of crime and its emotions in a final despair of poetry."

"Don't you know," replied Bianchon, quite drunk by this time, "that a dose of phosphorus more or less makes the man of genius or the scoundrel, a clever man or an idiot, a virtuous person or a criminal?"

"Can any one treat of virtue thus?" cried Cursy. "Virtue, the subject of every drama at the theatre, the *denoûment* of every play, the foundation of every court of law. . . ."

"Be quiet, you ass. You are an Achilles for virtue, without his heel," said Bixiou.

"Some drink!"

"What will you bet that I will drink a bottle of champagne like a flash, at one pull?"

"What a flash of wit!"

"Drunk as lords," muttered a young man gravely, trying to give some wine to his waistcoat.

"Yes, sir; real government is the art of ruling by public opinion."

"Opinion? That is the most vicious jade of all. According to you moralists and politicians, the laws you set up are always to go before those of nature, and opinion before conscience. You are right and wrong both. Suppose society bestows down pillows on us, that benefit is made up for by the gout; and justice is likewise tempered by red-tape, and colds accompany Cashmere shawls."

"Wretch!" Emile broke in upon the misanthrope, "how can you slander civilization here at table, up to the eyes in wines and exquisite dishes? Eat away at that roebuck with the gilded horns and feet, and do not carp at your mother. . . ."

"Is it any fault of mine if Catholicism puts a million deities in a sack of flour, that Republics will end in a Napoleon, that monarchy dwells between the assassination of Henri IV. and the trial of Louis XVI., and Liberalism produces La Fayettes?"

"Didn't you embrace him in July?"

"No."

"Then hold your tongue, you sceptic."

"Sceptics are the most conscientious of men."

"They have no conscience."

"What are you saying? They have two apiece at least!"

"So you want to discount heaven, a thoroughly commercial notion. Ancient religions were but the unchecked development of physical pleasure, but we have developed a soul and expectations; some advance has been made."

"What can you expect, my friends, of a century filled with politics to repletion?" asked Nathan. "What befell 'The History of the King of Bohemia and his Seven Castles,' a most entrancing conception? . . ."

"I say," the would-be critic cried down the whole length of the table. "The phrases might have been drawn at haphazard from a hat, 'twas a work written 'down to Charenton.'"

"You are a fool!"

"And you are a rogue!"

"Oh! oh!"

"Ah! ah!"

"They are going to fight."

"No, they aren't."

"You will find me to-morrow, sir."

"This very moment," Nathan answered.

"Come, come, you pair of fire-eaters!"

"You are another!" said the prime mover in the quarrel.

"They can hardly stand on their legs."

"Ah, I can't stand upright, perhaps?" asked the pugnacious Nathan, straightening himself up like a stag-beetle about to fly.

He stared stupidly round the table, then, completely exhausted by the effort, sank back into his chair, and mutely hung his head.

"Would it not have been nice," the critic said to his neighbor, "to fight about a book I have neither read nor seen?"

"Emile, look out for your coat, your neighbor is growing pale," said Bixiou.

"Kant? Yet another ball flung out for fools to sport with, sir! Materialism and spiritualism are a fine pair of battledores with which charlatans in long gowns keep a shuttlecock agoing. Suppose that God is everywhere, as Spinoza says, or that all things proceed from God, as says St. Paul . . . the nincompoops, the door shuts or opens, but isn't the movement the same? Does the fowl come from the egg, or the egg from the fowl? . . . Just hand me some duck . . . and there, you have all science."

"Simpleton!" cried the man of science, "your problem is settled by fact!"

"What fact?"

"Professors' chairs were not made for philosophy, but philosophy for the professors' chairs. Put on a pair of spectacles and read the budget."

"Thieves!"

"Nincompoops!"

"Knaves!"

"Gulls!"

"Where but in Paris will you find such a ready and rapid exchange of thought?" cried Bixiou in a deep, bass voice.

"Bixiou! Act a classical farce for us! Come, now."

"Would you like me to depict the nineteenth century?"

"Silence."

"Pay attention."

"Clap a muffle on your trumpets."

"Shut up, you Turk!"

"Give him some wine, and let that fellow keep quiet."

"Now, then, Bixiou!"

The artist buttoned his black coat to the collar, put on yellow gloves, and began to burlesque the "Revue des Deux Mondes" by acting a squinting old lady; but the uproar drowned his voice, and no one heard a word of the satire. Still, if he did not catch the spirit of the century, he represented the "Revue" at any rate, for his own intentions were not very clear to him.

Dessert was served as if by magic. A huge epergne of

gilded bronze from Thomire's studio overshadowed the table. Tall statuettes, which a celebrated artist had endued with ideal beauty according to conventional European notions, sustained and carried pyramids of strawberries, pines, fresh dates, golden grapes, clear-skinned peaches, oranges brought from Setubal by steamer, pomegranates, Chinese fruit; in short, all the surprises of luxury, miracles of confectionery, the most tempting dainties, and choicest delicacies. The coloring of this epicurean work of art was enhanced by the splendors of porcelain, by sparkling outlines of gold, by the chasing of the vases. Poussin's landscapes, copied on Sèvres ware, were crowned with graceful fringes of moss, green, translucent, and fragile as ocean weeds.

The revenue of a German prince would not have defrayed the cost of this arrogant display. Silver and mother-of-pearl, gold and crystal, were lavished afresh in new forms; but scarcely a vague idea of this almost Oriental fairyland penetrated eyes now heavy with wine, or crossed the delirium of intoxication. The fire and fragrance of the wines acted like potent philters and magical fumes, producing a kind of mirage in the brain, binding feet, and weighing down hands. The pyramids of fruit were ransacked, voices grew thicker, the clamor increased. Words were no longer distinct, glasses flew in pieces, senseless peals of laughter broke out. Cursy snatched up a horn and struck up a flourish on it. It acted like a signal given by the devil. Yells, hisses, songs, cries, and groans went up from the maddened crew. You might have smiled to see men, light-hearted by nature, grow tragical as Crébillon's dramas, and pensive as a sailor in a coach.

Hard-headed men blabbed secrets to the inquisitive, who were long past heeding them. Saturnine faces were wreathed in smiles worthy of a pirouetting dancer. Claude Vignon shuffled about like a bear in a cage. Intimate friends began to fight.

Animal likenesses, so curiously traced by physiologists in human faces, came out in gestures and behavior. A book

lay open for a Bichat if he had repaired thither fasting and collected. The master of the house, knowing his condition, did not dare to stir, but encouraged his guests' extravagances with a fixed grimacing smile, meant to be hospitable and appropriate. His large face, turning from blue and red to a purple shade terrible to see, partook of the general commotion by movements like the heaving and pitching of a brig.

"Now, did you murder them?" Emile asked him.

"Capital punishment is going to be abolished, they say, in favor of the Revolution of July," answered Taillefer, raising his eyebrows with drunken sagacity.

"Don't they rise up before you in dreams at times?" Raphael persisted.

"There's a statute of limitations," said the murderer—Crœsus.

"And on his tombstone," Emile began, with a sardonic laugh, "the stonemason will carve 'Passer-by, accord a tear, in memory of one that's here!' Oh," he continued, "I would cheerfully pay a hundred sous to any mathematician who would prove the existence of hell to me by an algebraical equation."

He flung up a coin and cried—"Heads for the existence of God!"

"Don't look!" Raphael cried, pouncing upon it. "Who knows? Suspense is so pleasant."

"Unluckily," Emile said, with burlesque melancholy, "I can see no halting-place between the unbeliever's arithmetic and the papal 'Pater noster.' Pshaw! let us drink. *Tring* was, I believe, the oracular answer of the *dive bouteille* and the final conclusion of Pantagruel."

"We owe our arts and monuments to the *Pater noster*, and our knowledge, too, perhaps; and a still greater benefit —modern government—whereby a vast and teeming society is wondrously represented by some five hundred intellects. It neutralizes opposing forces and gives free play to CIVILIZATION, that Titan queen who has succeeded the ancient terrible figure of the KING, that sham Providence, reared

by man between himself and heaven. In the face of such achievements, atheism seems like a barren skeleton. What do you say?"

"I am thinking of the seas of blood shed by Catholicism," Emile replied, quite unimpressed. "It has drained our hearts and veins dry to make a mimic deluge. No matter! Every man who thinks must range himself beneath the banner of Christ, for He alone has consummated the triumph of spirit over matter; He alone has revealed to us, like a poet, an intermediate world that separates us from the Deity."

"Believest thou?" asked Raphael with an unaccountable drunken smile. "Very good; we must not commit ourselves; so we will drink the celebrated toast, *Diis ignotis!*"

And they drained the chalice filled up with science, carbonic acid gas, perfumes, poetry, and incredulity.

"If the gentlemen will go to the drawing-room, coffee is ready for them," said the major-domo.

There was scarcely one of those present whose mind was not floundering by this time in the delights of chaos, where every spark of intelligence is quenched, and the body, set free from its tyranny, gives itself up to the frenetic joys of liberty. Some who had arrived at the apogee of intoxication were dejected, as they painfully tried to arrest a single thought which might assure them of their own existence; others, deep in the heavy morasses of indigestion, denied the possibility of movement. The noisy and the silent were oddly assorted.

For all that, when new joys were announced to them by the stentorian tones of the servant, who spoke on his master's behalf, they all rose, leaning upon, dragging or carrying one another. But on the threshold of the room the entire crew paused for a moment, motionless, as if fascinated. The intemperate pleasures of the banquet seemed to fade away at this titillating spectacle, prepared by their amphitryon to appeal to the most sensual of their instincts.

Beneath the shining wax-lights in a golden chandelier, round about a table inlaid with gilded metal, a group of

women, whose eyes shone like diamonds, suddenly met the stupefied stare of the revellers. Their toilets were splendid, but less magnificent than their beauty, which eclipsed the other marvels of this palace. A light shone from their eyes, bewitching as those of sirens, more brilliant and ardent than the blaze that streamed down upon the snowy marble, the delicately carved surfaces of bronze, and lighted up the satin sheen of the tapestry. The contrasts of their attitudes and the slight movements of their heads, each differing in character and nature of attraction, set the heart afire. It was like a thicket, where blossoms mingled with rubies, sapphires, and coral; a combination of gossamer scarfs that flickered like beacon-lights; of black ribbons about snowy throats; of gorgeous turbans and demurely enticing apparel. It was a seraglio that appealed to every eye, and fulfilled every fancy. Each form posed to admiration was scarcely concealed by the folds of cashmere, and half hidden, half revealed by transparent gauze and diaphanous silk. The little slender feet were eloquent, though the fresh red lips uttered no sound.

Demure and fragile-looking girls, pictures of maidenly innocence, with a semblance of conventual unction about their heads, were there like apparitions that a breath might dissipate. Aristocratic beauties with haughty glances; languid, flexible, slender, and complaisant, bent their heads as though there were royal protectors still in the market. An Englishwoman seemed like a spirit of melancholy — some coy, pale, shadowy form among Ossian's mists, or a type of remorse flying from crime. The Parisienne was not wanting in all her beauty that consists in an indescribable charm; armed with her irresistible weakness, vain of her costume and her wit, pliant and hard, a heartless, passionless siren that yet can create factitious treasures of passion and counterfeit emotion.

Italians shone in the throng, serene and self-possessed in their bliss; handsome Normans, with splendid figures; women of the south, with black hair and well-shaped eyes.

Lebel might have summoned together all the fair women of Versailles, who since morning had perfected all their wiles, and now came like a troop of Oriental women, bidden by the slave merchant to be ready to set out at dawn. They stood disconcerted and confused about the table, huddled together in a murmuring group like bees in a hive. The combination of timid embarrassment with coquettishness and a sort of expostulation was the result either of calculated effect or a spontaneous modesty. Perhaps a sentiment of which women are never utterly divested prescribed to them the cloak of modesty to heighten and enhance the charms of wantonness. So the venerable Taillefer's designs seemed on the point of collapse, for these unbridled natures were subdued from the very first by the majesty with which woman is invested. There was a murmur of admiration, which vibrated like a soft musical note. Wine had not taken love for travelling companion; instead of a violent tumult of passions, the guests thus taken by surprise, in a moment of weakness, gave themselves up to luxurious raptures of delight.

Artists obeyed the voice of poetry which constrains them, and studied with pleasure the different delicate tints of these chosen examples of beauty. Sobered by a thought perhaps due to some emanation from a bubble of carbonic acid in the champagne, a philosopher shuddered at the misfortunes which had brought these women, once perhaps worthy of the truest devotion, to this. Each one doubtless could have unfolded a cruel tragedy. Infernal tortures followed in the train of most of them, and they drew after them faithless men, broken vows, and pleasures atoned for in wretchedness. Polite advances were made by the guests, and conversations began, as varied in character as the speakers. They broke up into groups. It might have been a fashionable drawing-room where ladies and young girls offer after dinner the assistance that coffee, liqueurs, and sugar afford to diners who are struggling in the toils of a perverse digestion. But in a little while laughter broke out, the murmur

grew, and voices were raised. The saturnalia, subdued for a moment, threatened at times to renew itself. The alternations of sound and silence bore a distant resemblance to a symphony of Beethoven's.

The two friends, seated on a silken divan, were first approached by a tall, well-proportioned girl of stately bearing; her features were irregular, but her face was striking and vehement in expression, and impressed the mind by the vigor of its contrasts. Her dark hair fell in luxuriant curls, with which some hand seemed to have played havoc already, for the locks fell lightly over the splendid shoulders that thus attracted attention. The long brown curls half hid her queenly throat, though where the light fell upon it the delicacy of its fine outlines was revealed. Her warm and vivid coloring was set off by the dead white of her complexion. Bold and ardent glances came from under the long eyelashes; the damp, red, half-open lips challenged a kiss. Her frame was strong but compliant; with a bust and arms strongly developed, as in figures drawn by the Caracci, she yet seemed active and elastic, with a panther's strength and suppleness, and in the same way the energetic grace of her figure suggested fierce pleasures.

But though she might romp perhaps and laugh, there was something terrible in her eyes and her smile. Like a pythoness possessed by the demon, she inspired awe rather than pleasure. All changes, one after another, flashed like lightning over every mobile feature of her face. She might captivate a jaded fancy, but a young man would have feared her. She was like some colossal statue fallen from the height of a Greek temple, so grand when seen afar, too roughly hewn to be seen anear. And yet, in spite of all, her terrible beauty could have stimulated exhaustion; her voice might charm the deaf; her glances might put life into the bones of the dead; and therefore Emile was vaguely reminded of one of Shakespeare's tragedies—a wonderful maze, in which joy groans, and there is something wild even about love, and the magic of forgiveness and the warmth of happiness succeed to cruel

storms of rage. She was a siren that can both kiss and devour; laugh like a devil, or weep as angels can. She could concentrate in one instant all a woman's powers of attraction in a single effort (the sighs of melancholy and the charms of maiden's shyness alone excepted), then in a moment rise in fury like a nation in revolt, and tear herself, her passion, and her lover, in pieces.

Dressed in red velvet, she trampled under her reckless feet the stray flowers fallen from other heads, and held out a salver to the two friends, with careless hands. The white arms stood out in bold relief against the velvet. Proud of her beauty; proud (who knows?) of her corruption, she stood like a queen of pleasure, like an incarnation of enjoyment; the enjoyment that comes of squandering the accumulations of three generations; that scoffs at its progenitors, and makes merry over a corpse; that will dissolve pearls and wreck thrones, turn old men into boys, and make young men prematurely old; enjoyment only possible to giants weary of their power, tormented by reflection, or for whom strife has become a plaything.

"What is your name?" asked Raphael.

"Aquilina."

"Out of 'Venice Preserved'!" exclaimed Emile.

"Yes," she answered. "Just as a pope takes a new name when he is exalted above all other men, I, too, took another name when I raised myself above women's level."

"Then have you, like your patron saint, a terrible and noble lover, a conspirator, who would die for you?" cried Emile eagerly — this gleam of poetry had aroused his interest.

"Once I had," she answered. "But I had a rival too in La Guillotine. I have worn something red about me ever since, lest any happiness should carry me away."

"Oh, if you are going to get her on to the story of those four lads of La Rochelle, she will never get to the end of it. That's enough, Aquilina. As if every woman could not bewail some lover or other, though not every one has the luck

to lose him on the scaffold, as you have done. I would a great deal sooner see a lover of mine in a trench at the back of Clamart than in a rival's arms."

All this in the gentlest and most melodious accents, and pronounced by the prettiest, gentlest, and most innocent-looking little person that a fairy wand ever drew from an enchanted eggshell. She had come up noiselessly, and they became aware of a slender, dainty figure, charmingly timid blue eyes, and white transparent brows. No *ingenue* among the naiads, a truant from her river spring, could have been shyer, whiter, more ingenuous than this young girl, seemingly about sixteen years old, ignorant of evil and of the storms of life, and fresh from some church in which she must have prayed the angels to call her to heaven before the time. Only in Paris are such natures as this to be found, concealing depths of depravity behind a fair mask, and the most artificial vices beneath a brow as young and fair as an opening flower.

At first the angelic promise of those soft lineaments misled the friends. Raphael and Emile took the coffee which she poured into the cups brought by Aquilina, and began to talk with her. In the eyes of the two poets she soon became transformed into some sombre allegory, of I know not what aspect of human life. She opposed to the vigorous and ardent expression of her commanding acquaintance a revelation of heartless corruption and voluptuous cruelty. Heedless enough to perpetrate a crime, hardy enough to feel no misgivings; a pitiless demon that wrings larger and kinder natures with torments that it is incapable of knowing, that simpers over a traffic in love, sheds tears over a victim's funeral, and beams with joy over the reading of the will. A poet might have admired the magnificent Aquilina; but the winning Euphrasia must be repulsive to every one—the first was the soul of sin; the second, sin without a soul in it.

"I should dearly like to know," Emile remarked to this pleasing being, "if you ever reflect upon your future?"

"My future!" she answered with a laugh. "What do

you mean by my future? Why should I think about something that does not exist as yet? I never look before or behind. Isn't one day at a time more than I can concern myself with as it is? And besides, the future, as we know, means the hospital."

"How can you foresee a future in the hospital, and make no effort to avert it?"

"What is there so alarming about the hospital?" asked the terrific Aquilina. "When we are neither wives nor mothers, when old age draws black stockings over our limbs, sets wrinkles on our brows, withers up the woman in us, and darkens the light in our lover's eyes, what could we need when that comes to pass? You would look on us then as mere human clay; we with our habiliments shall be for you like so much mud—worthless, lifeless, crumbling to pieces, going about with the rustle of dead leaves. Rags or the daintiest finery will be as one to us then; the ambergris of the boudoir will breathe an odor of death and dry bones; and suppose there is a heart there in that mud, not one of you but would make mock of it, not so much as a memory will you spare to us. Is not our existence precisely the same whether we live in a fine mansion with lap-dogs to tend, or sort rags in a workhouse? Does it make much difference whether we shall hide our gray heads beneath lace or a handkerchief striped with blue and red; whether we sweep a crossing with a birch broom, or the steps of the Tuileries with satins; whether we sit beside a gilded hearth, or cower over the ashes in a red earthen pot; whether we go to the Opera or look on in the Place de Grève?"

"*Aquilina mia*, you have never shown more sense than in this depressing fit of yours," Euphrasia remarked. "Yes, Cashmere, *point d'Alençon*, perfumes, gold, silks, luxury, everything that sparkles, everything pleasant, belongs to youth alone. Time alone may show us our folly, but good fortune will acquit us. You are laughing at me," she went on, with a malicious glance at the friends; "but am I not right? I would sooner die of pleasure than of illness. I

am not afflicted with a mania for perpetuity, nor have I a great veneration for human nature, such as God has made it. Give me millions, and I would squander them; I should not keep one centime for the year to come. Live to be charming and have power, that is the decree of my every heart-beat. Society sanctions my life; does it not pay for my extravagances? Why does Providence pay me every morning my income, which I spend every evening? Why are hospitals built for us? And Providence did not put good and evil on either hand for us to select what tires and pains us. I should be very foolish if I did not amuse myself."

"And how about others?" asked Emile.

"Others? Oh, well, they must manage for themselves. I prefer laughing at their woes to weeping over my own. I defy any man to give me the slightest uneasiness."

"What have you suffered to make you think like this?" asked Raphael.

"I myself have been forsaken for an inheritance," she said, striking an attitude that displayed all her charms; "and yet I had worked night and day to keep my lover! I am not to be gulled by any smile or vow, and I have set myself to make one long entertainment of my life."

"But does not happiness come from the soul within?" cried Raphael.

"It may be so," Aquilina answered; "but is it nothing to be conscious of admiration and flattery; to triumph over other women, even over the most virtuous, humiliating them before our beauty and our splendor? Not only so; one day of our life is worth ten years of a bourgeoise existence, and so it is all summed up."

"Is not a woman hateful without virtue?" Emile said to Raphael.

Euphrasia's glance was like a viper's, as she said with an irony in her voice that cannot be rendered—"Virtue! we leave that to deformity and to ugly women. What would the poor things be without it?"

"Hush, be quiet," Emile broke in. "Don't talk about something you have never known."

"That I have never known!" Euphrasia answered. "You give yourself for life to some person you abominate; you must bring up children who will neglect you, who wound your very heart, and you must say, 'Thank you!' for it; and these are the virtues you prescribe to woman. And that is not enough. By way of requiting her self-denial, you must come and add to her sorrows by trying to lead her astray; and though you are rebuffed, she is compromised. A nice life! How far better to keep one's freedom, to follow one's inclinations in love, and die young."

"Have you no fear of the price to be paid some day for all this?"

"Even then," she said, "instead of mingling pleasures and troubles, my life will consist of two separate parts—a youth of happiness is secure, and there may come a hazy, uncertain old age, during which I can suffer at my leisure."

"She has never loved," came in the deep tones of Aquilina's voice. "She never went a hundred leagues to drink in one look and a denial with untold raptures. She has not hung her own life on a thread, nor tried to stab more than one man to save her sovereign lord, her king, her divinity. . . . Love, for her, meant a fascinating colonel."

"Here she is with her La Rochelle," Euphrasia made answer. "Love comes like the wind, no one knows whence. And, for that matter, if one of those brutes had once fallen in love with you, you would hold sensible men in horror."

"Brutes are put out of the question by the Code," said the tall, sarcastic Aquilina.

"I thought you had more kindness for the army," laughed Euphrasia.

"How happy they are in their power of dethroning their reason in this way," Raphael exclaimed.

"Happy?" asked Aquilina, with a dreadful look, and a smile full of pity and terror. "Ah, you do not know what

it is to be condemned to a life of pleasure, with your dead hidden in your heart. . . ."

A moment's consideration of the rooms was like a foretaste of Milton's Pandemonium. The faces of those still capable of drinking were a hideous blue tint, from burning draughts of punch. Mad dances were kept up with wild energy, excited laughter and outcries broke out like the explosion of fireworks. The boudoir and a small adjoining room were strewn like a battlefield with the insensible and incapable. Wine, pleasure, and dispute had heated the atmosphere. Wine and love, delirium and unconsciousness possessed them, and were written upon all faces, upon the furniture; were expressed by the surrounding disorder, and brought light films over the vision of those assembled, so that the air seemed full of intoxicating vapor. A glittering dust arose, as in the luminous paths made by a ray of sunlight, the most bizarre forms flitted through it, grotesque struggles were seen athwart it. Groups of interlaced figures blended with the white marbles, the noble masterpieces of sculpture that adorned the rooms.

Though the two friends yet preserved a sort of fallacious clearness in their ideas and voices, a feeble appearance and faint thrill of animation, it was yet almost impossible to distinguish what was real among the fantastic absurdities before them, or what foundation there was for the impossible pictures that passed unceasingly before their weary eyes. The strangest phenomena of dreams beset them, the lowering heavens, the fervid sweetness caught by faces in our visions, and unheard-of agility under a load of chains—all these so vividly that they took the pranks of the orgy about them for the freaks of some nightmare in which all movement is silent, and cries never reach the ear. The *valet de chambre* succeeded just then in drawing his master into the antechamber to whisper to him: "The neighbors are all at their windows, complaining of the racket, sir."

"If noise alarms them, why don't they lay down straw before their doors?" was Taillefer's rejoinder.

Raphael's sudden burst of laughter was so unseasonable and abrupt that his friend demanded the reason of his unseemly hilarity.

"You will hardly understand me," he replied. "In the first place, I must admit that you stopped me on the Quai Voltaire just as I was about to throw myself into the Seine, and you would like to know, no doubt, my motives for dying. And when I proceed to tell you that by an almost miraculous chance the most poetic memorials of the material world had but just then been summed up for me as a symbolical interpretation of human wisdom; while at this minute the remains of all the intellectual treasures ravaged by us at table are comprised in these two women, the living and authentic types of folly, would you be any the wiser? Our profound apathy toward men and things supplied the half-tones in a crudely contrasted picture of two theories of life so diametrially opposed. If you were not drunk, you might perhaps catch a gleam of philosophy in this."

"And if you had not both feet on that fascinating Aquilina, whose heavy breathing suggests an analogy with the sounds of a storm about to burst," replied Emile, absently engaged in the harmless amusement of winding and unwinding Euphrasia's hair, "you would be ashamed of your inebriated garrulity. Both your systems can be packed in a phrase, and reduced to a single idea. The mere routine of living brings a stupid kind of wisdom with it, by blunting our intelligence with work; and on the other hand, a life passed in the limbo of the abstract or in the abysses of the moral world produces a sort of wisdom run mad. The conditions may be summed up in brief; we may extinguish emotion, and so live to old age, or we may choose to die young as martyrs to contending passions. And yet this decree is at variance with the temperaments with which we were endowed by the bitter jester who modelled all creatures."

"Idiot!" Raphael burst in. "Go on epitomizing yourself after that fashion, and you will fill volumes. If I

attempted to formulate those two ideas clearly, I might as well say that man is corrupted by the exercise of his wits, and purified by ignorance. You are calling the whole fabric of society to account. But whether we live with the wise or perish with the fool, isn't the result the same sooner or later? And have not the prime constituents of the quintessence of both systems been before expressed in a couple of words—*Carymary, carymara.*"

"You make me doubt the existence of a God, for your stupidity is greater than His power," said Emile. "Our beloved Rabelais summed it all up in a shorter word than your '*Carymary, carymara*'; from his *Peut-être* Montaigne derived his own *Que sais-je?* After all, this last word of moral science is scarcely more than the cry of Pyrrhus set betwixt good and evil, or Buridan's ass between the two measures of oats. But let this everlasting question alone, resolved to-day by a 'Yes' and a 'No.' What experience did you look to find by a jump into the Seine? Were you jealous of the hydraulic machine on the Pont Nôtre Dame?"

"Ah, if you but knew my history!"

"Pooh," said Emile; "I did not think you could be so commonplace; that remark is hackneyed. Don't you know that every one of us claims to have suffered as no other ever did?"

"Ah!" Raphael sighed.

"What a mountebank art thou with thy 'Ah!' Look here, now! Does some disease of mind or body, by contracting your muscles, bring back of a morning the wild horses that tear you in pieces at night, as with Damiens once upon a time? Were you driven to sup off your own dog in a garret, uncooked and without salt? Have your children ever cried, 'I am hungry'? Have you sold your mistress's hair to hazard the money at play? Have you ever drawn a sham bill of exchange on a fictitious uncle at a sham address, and feared lest you should not be in time to take it up? Come now, I am attending! If you were going to drown yourself for some woman, or by way of a protest, or

out of sheer dulness, I disown you. Make your confession, and no lies! I don't at all want a historical memoir. And, above all things, be as concise as your clouded intellect permits; I am as critical as a professor, and as sleepy as a woman at her vespers."

"You silly fool!" said Raphael. "When has not suffering been keener for a more susceptible nature? Some day, when science has attained to a pitch that enables us to study the natural history of hearts, when they are named and classified in genera, sub-genera, and families; into crustaceæ, fossils, saurians, infusoria, or whatever it is—then, my dear fellow, it will be ascertained that there are natures as tender and fragile as flowers, that are broken by the slight bruises that some stony hearts do not even feel—"

"For pity's sake, spare me thy exordium," said Emile, as, half plaintive, half amused, he took Raphael's hand.

II

A WOMAN WITHOUT A HEART

AFTER A MOMENT'S SILENCE, Raphael said, with a careless gesture: "Perhaps it is an effect of the fumes of punch—I really cannot tell—this clearness of mind that enables me to comprise my whole life in a single picture, where figures and hues, lights, shades, and half-tones are faithfully rendered. I should not have been so surprised at this poetical play of imagination if it were not accompanied with a sort of scorn for my past joys and sorrows. Seen from afar, my life appears to contract by some mental process. That long, slow agony of ten years' duration can be brought to memory to-day in some few phrases, in which pain is resolved into a mere idea, and pleasure becomes a philosophical reflection. Instead of feeling things, I weigh and consider them—"

"You are as tiresome as the explanation of an amendment," cried Emile.

"Very likely," said Raphael submissively. "I spare you the first seventeen years of my life for fear of abusing a listener's patience. Till that time, like you and thousands of others, I had lived my life at school or the *lycee*, with its imaginary troubles and genuine happinesses, which are so pleasant to look back upon. Our jaded palates still crave for that Lenten fare, so long as we have not tried it afresh. It was a pleasant life, with the tasks that we thought so contemptible, but which taught us application for all that. . . ."

"Let the drama begin," said Emile, half-plaintively, half-comically.

"When I left school," Raphael went on, with a gesture that claimed the right of speaking, "my father submitted me to a strict discipline; he installed me in a room near his own study, and I had to rise at five in the morning and be in bed by nine at night. He meant me to take my law studies seriously. I attended the Schools, and read with an advocate as well; but my lectures and work were so narrowly circumscribed by the laws of time and space, and my father required such a strict account of my doings, at dinner, that . . ."

"What is this to me?" asked Emile.

"The devil take you!" said Raphael. "How are you to enter into my feelings if I do not relate the facts that insensibly shaped my character, made me timid, and prolonged the period of youthful simplicity? In this manner I cowered under as strict a despotism as a monarch's till I came of age. To depict the tedium of my life, it will be perhaps enough to portray my father for you. He was tall, thin, and slight, with a hatchet face, and pale complexion; a man of few words, fidgety as an old maid, exacting as a senior clerk. His paternal solicitude hovered over my merriment and gleeful thoughts, and seemed to cover them with a leaden pall. Any effusive demonstration on my part was received by him as a childish absurdity. I was far more afraid of him than I had been of any of our masters at school.

"I seem to see him before me at this moment. In his chestnut-brown frockcoat he looked like a red herring wrapped up in the cover of a pamphlet, and he held himself as erect as an Easter candle. But I was fond of my father, and at heart he was right enough. Perhaps we never hate severity when it has its source in greatness of character and pure morals, and is skilfully tempered with kindness. My father, it is true, never left me a moment to myself, and only when I was twenty years old gave me so much as ten francs of my own, ten knavish prodigals of francs, such a hoard as I had long vainly desired, which set me a-dreaming of unutterable felicity; yet, for all that, he sought to procure relaxations for me. When he had promised me a treat months beforehand, he would take me to Les Bouffons, or to a concert or ball, where I hoped to find a mistress. . . . A mistress! that meant independence. But bashful and timid as I was, knowing nobody, and ignorant of the dialect of drawing-rooms, I always came back as awkward as ever, and swelling with unsatisfied desires, to be put in harness like a troop horse next day by my father, and to return with morning to my advocate, the Palais de Justice, and the law. To have swerved from the straight course which my father had mapped out for me would have drawn down his wrath upon me; at my first delinquency, he threatened to ship me off as a cabin-boy to the Antilles. A dreadful shiver ran through me if I had ventured to spend a couple of hours in some pleasure party.

"Imagine the most wandering imagination and passionate temperament, the tenderest soul and most artistic nature, dwelling continually in the presence of the most flint-hearted, atrabilious, and frigid man on earth; think of me as a young girl married to a skeleton, and you will understand the life whose curious scenes can only be a hearsay tale to you; the plans for running away that perished at the sight of my father, the despair soothed by slumber, the dark broodings charmed away by music. I breathed my sorrows forth in melodies. Beethoven or Mozart would keep my confidences

sacred. Nowadays, I smile at recollections of the scruple which burdened my conscience at that epoch of innocence and virtue.

"If I set foot in a restaurant, I gave myself up for lost; my fancy led me to look on a café as a disreputable haunt, where men lost their characters and embarrassed their fortunes; as for engaging in play, I had not the money to risk. Oh, if I needed to send you to sleep, I would tell you about one of the most frightful pleasures of my life, one of those pleasures with fangs that bury themselves in the heart as the branding-iron enters the convict's shoulder. I was at a ball at the house of the Duc de Navarreins, my father's cousin. But to make my position the more perfectly clear, you must know that I wore a threadbare coat, ill-fitting shoes, a tie fit for a stableman, and a soiled pair of gloves. I shrank into a corner to eat ices and watch the pretty faces at my leisure. My father noticed me. Actuated by some motive that I did not fathom, so dumfounded was I by this act of confidence, he handed me his keys and purse to keep. Ten paces away some men were gambling. I heard the rattling of gold; I was twenty years old; I longed to be steeped for one whole day in the follies of my time of life. It was a license of the imagination that would find a parallel neither in the freaks of courtesans nor in the dreams of young girls. For a year past I had beheld myself well dressed, in a carriage, with a pretty woman by my side, playing the great lord, dining at Véry's, deciding not to go back home till the morrow; but was prepared for my father with a plot more intricate than the Marriage of Figaro, which he could not possibly have unravelled. All this bliss would cost, I estimated, fifty crowns. Was it not the artless idea of playing truant that still had charms for me?

"I went into a small adjoining room, and when alone counted my father's money with smarting eyes and trembling fingers—a hundred crowns! The joys of my escapade rose before me at the thought of the amount; joys that flitted about me like Macbeth's witches round their caldron;

joys how alluring! how thrilling! how delicious! I became a deliberate rascal. I heeded neither my tingling ears nor the violent beating of my heart, but took out two twenty-franc pieces that I seem to see yet. The dates had been erased, and Bonaparte's head simpered upon them. After I had put back the purse in my pocket, I returned to a gaming-table with the two pieces of gold in the palms of my damp hands, prowling about the players like a sparrow-hawk round a coop of chickens. Tormented by inexpressible terror, I flung a sudden clairvoyant glance round me, and feeling quite sure that I was seen by none of my acquaintance, betted on a stout, jovial little man, heaping upon his head more prayers and vows than are put up during two or three storms at sea. Then, with an intuitive scoundrelism, or Machiavelism, surprising in one of my age, I went and stood in the door, and looked about me in the rooms, though I saw nothing; for both mind and eyes hovered about that fateful green cloth.

"That evening fixes the date of a first observation of a physiological kind; to it I owe a kind of insight into certain mysteries of our double nature that I have since been enabled to penetrate. I had my back turned on the table where my future felicity lay at stake, a felicity but so much the more intense that it was criminal. Between me and the players stood a wall of onlookers some five deep, who were chatting; the murmur of voices drowned the clinking of gold, which mingled in the sounds sent up by this orchestra; yet, despite all obstacles, I distinctly heard the words of the two players by a gift accorded to the passions, which enables them to annihilate time and space. I saw the points they made; I knew which of the two turned up the king as well as if I had actually seen the cards; at a distance of ten paces, in short, the fortunes of play blanched my face.

"My father suddenly went by, and then I knew what the Scripture meant by 'The Spirit of God passed before his face.' I had won. I slipped through the crowd of men who had gathered about the players with the quickness of an eel es-

caping through a broken mesh in a net. My nerves thrilled with joy instead of anguish. I felt like some criminal on the way to torture released by a chance meeting with the king. It happened that a man with a decoration found himself short by forty francs. Uneasy eyes suspected me; I turned pale, and drops of perspiration stood on my forehead. I was well punished, I thought, for having robbed my father. Then the kind little stout man said, in a voice like an angel's surely, 'All these gentlemen have paid their stakes,' and put down the forty francs himself. I raised my head in triumph upon the players. After I had returned the money I had taken from it to my father's purse, I left my winnings with that honest and worthy gentleman, who continued to win. As soon as I found myself possessed of a hundred and sixty francs, I wrapped them up in my handkerchief, so that they could neither move nor rattle on the way back; and I played no more.

"'What were you doing at the card-table?' said my father as we stepped into the carriage.

"'I was looking on,' I answered, trembling.

"'But it would have been nothing out of the common if you had been prompted by self-love to put some money down on the table. In the eyes of men of the world you are quite old enough to assume the right to commit such follies. So I should have pardoned you, Raphael, if you had made use of my purse. . . .'

"I did not answer. When we reached home, I returned the keys and money to my father. As he entered his study, he emptied out his purse on the mantelpiece, counted the money, and turned to me with a kindly look, saying, with more or less long and significant pauses between each phrase—

"'My boy, you are very nearly twenty now. I am satisfied with you. You ought to have an allowance, if only to teach you how to lay it out, and to gain some acquaintance with every-day business. Henceforward I shall let you have a hundred francs each month. Here is your first quar-

ter's income for this year,' he added, fingering a pile of gold, as if to make sure that the amount was correct. 'Do what you please with it.'

"I confess that I was ready to fling myself at his feet, to tell him that I was a thief, a scoundrel, and, worse than all, a liar! But a feeling of shame held me back. I went up to him for an embrace, but he gently pushed me away.

" 'You are a man now, *my child*,' he said. 'What I have just done was a very proper and simple thing, for which there is no need to thank me. If I have any claim to your gratitude, Raphael,' he went on, in a kind but dignified way, 'it is because I have preserved your youth from the evils that destroy young men in Paris. We will be two friends henceforth. In a year's time you will be a doctor of law. Not without some hardship and privation you have acquired the sound knowledge and the love of, and application to, work that is indispensable to public men. You must learn to know me, Raphael. I do not want to make either an advocate or a notary of you, but a statesman, who shall be the pride of our poor house. . . . Good-night,' he added.

"From that day my father took me fully into confidence. I was an only son; and, ten years before, I had lost my mother. In time past my father, the head of a historic family remembered even now in Auvergne, had come to Paris to fight against his evil star, dissatisfied at the prospect of tilling the soil, with his useless sword by his side. He was endowed with the shrewdness that gives the men of the south of France a certain ascendency when energy goes with it. Almost unaided, he made a position for himself near the fountain of power. The Revolution brought a reverse of fortune, but he had managed to marry an heiress of good family, and, in the time of the Empire, appeared to be on the point of restoring to our house its ancient splendor.

"The Restoration, while it brought back considerable property to my mother, was my father's ruin. He had formerly purchased several estates abroad, conferred by the Emperor on his generals; and now for ten years he struggled

with liquidators, diplomatists, and Prussian and Bavarian courts of law, over the disputed possession of these unfortunate endowments. My father plunged me into the intricate labyrinths of law proceedings on which our future depended. We might be compelled to return the rents, as well as the proceeds arising from sales of timber made during the years 1814 to 1817; in that case my mother's property would have barely saved our credit. So it fell out that the day on which my father in a fashion emancipated me brought me under a most galling yoke. I entered on a conflict like a battlefield; I must work day and night; seek interviews with statesmen, surprise their convictions, try to interest them in our affairs, and gain them over, with their wives and servants, and their very dogs; and all this abominable business had to take the form of pretty speeches and polite attentions. Then I knew the mortifications that had left their blighting traces on my father's face. For about a year I led outwardly the life of a man of the world, but enormous labors lay beneath the surface of gadding about, and eager efforts to attach myself to influential kinsmen, or to people likely to be useful to us. My relaxations were lawsuits, and memorials still furnished the staple of my conversation. Hitherto my life had been blameless, from the sheer impossibility of indulging the desires of youth; but now I became my own master, and in dread of involving us both in ruin by some piece of negligence, I did not dare to allow myself any pleasure or expenditure.

"While we are young, and before the world has rubbed off the delicate bloom from our sentiments, the freshness of our impressions, the noble purity of conscience which will never allow us to palter with evil, the sense of duty is very strong within us, the voice of honor clamors within us, and we are open and straightforward. At that time I was all these things. I wished to justify my father's confidence in me. But lately I would have stolen a paltry sum from him with secret delight; but now that I shared the burden of his affairs, of his name and of his house, I would secretly have

given up my fortune and my hopes for him, as I was sacrificing my pleasures, and even have been glad of the sacrifice! So when M. de Villèle exhumed, for our special benefit, an imperial decree concerning forfeitures, and had ruined us, I authorized the sale of my property, only retaining an island in the middle of the Loire where my mother was buried. Perhaps arguments and evasions, philosophical, philanthropic, and political considerations would not fail me now, to hinder the perpetration of what my solicitor termed a 'folly'; but at one-and-twenty, I repeat, we are all aglow with generosity and affection. The tears that stood in my father's eyes were to me the most splendid of fortunes, and the thought of those tears has often soothed my sorrow. Ten months after he had paid his creditors, my father died of grief; I was his idol, and he had ruined me! The thought killed him. Toward the end of the autumn of 1826, at the age of twenty-two, I was the sole mourner at his graveside —the grave of my father and my earliest friend. Not many young men have found themselves alone with their thoughts as they followed a hearse, or have seen themselves lost in crowded Paris, and without money or prospects. Orphans rescued by public charity have at any rate the future of the battlefield before them, and find a shelter in some institution and a father in the government or in the *procureur du roi.* I had nothing.

"Three months later, an agent made over to me eleven hundred and twelve francs, the net proceeds of the winding up of my father's affairs. Our creditors had driven us to sell our furniture. From my childhood I had been used to set a high value on the articles of luxury about us, and I could not help showing my astonishment at the sight of this meagre balance.

" 'Oh, rococo, all of it!' said the auctioneer. A terrible word that fell like a blight on the sacred memories of my childhood, and dispelled my earliest illusions, the dearest of all. My entire fortune was comprised in this 'account rendered,' my future lay in a linen bag with eleven hundred

and twelve francs in it, human society stood before me in the person of an auctioneer's clerk, who kept his hat on while he spoke. Jonathas, an old servant who was much attached to me, and whom my mother had formerly pensioned with an annuity of four hundred francs, spoke to me as I was leaving the house that I had so often gayly left for a drive in my childhood.

"'Be very economical, Monsieur Raphael!'

"The good fellow was crying.

"Such were the events, dear Emile, that ruled my destinies, molded my character, and set me, while still young, in an utterly false social position," said Raphael after a pause. "Family ties, weak ones, it is true, bound me to a few wealthy houses, but my own pride would have kept me aloof from them if contempt and indifference had not shut their doors on me in the first place. I was related to people who were very influential, and who lavished their patronage on strangers; but I found neither relations nor patrons in them. Continually circumscribed in my affections, they recoiled upon me. Unreserved and simple by nature, I must have appeared frigid and sophisticated. My father's discipline had destroyed all confidence in myself. I was shy and awkward; I could not believe that my opinion carried any weight whatever; I took no pleasure in myself; I thought myself ugly, and was ashamed to meet my own eyes. In spite of the inward voice that must be the stay of a man with anything in him, in all his struggles, the voice that cries, 'Courage! Go forward!' in spite of sudden revelations of my own strength in my solitude; in spite of the hopes that thrilled me as I compared new works, that the public admired so much, with the schemes that hovered in my brain—in spite of all this, I had a childish mistrust of myself.

"An overweening ambition preyed upon me; I believed that I was meant for great things, and yet I felt myself to be nothing. I had need of other men, and I was friendless. I found I must make my way in the world, where I was quite alone, and bashful, rather than afraid.

"All through the year in which, by my father's wish, I threw myself into the whirlpool of fashionable society, I came away with an inexperienced heart, and fresh in mind. Like every grown child, I sighed in secret for a love affair. I met, among young men of my own age, a set of swaggerers who held their heads high, and talked about trifles as they seated themselves without a tremor beside women who inspired awe in me. They chattered nonsense, sucked the heads of their canes, gave themselves affected airs, appropriated the fairest women, and laid, or pretended that they had laid their heads on every pillow. Pleasure, seemingly, was at their beck and call; they looked on the most virtuous and prudish as an easy prey, ready to surrender at a word, at the slightest impudent gesture or insolent look. I declare, on my soul and conscience, that the attainment of power, or of a great name in literature, seemed to me an easier victory than a success with some young, witty, and gracious lady of high degree.

"So I found the tumult of my heart, my feelings, and my creeds all at variance with the axioms of society. I had plenty of audacity in my character, but none in my manner. Later, I found out that women did not like to be implored. I have from afar adored many a one to whom I devoted a soul proof against all tests, a heart to break, energy that shrank from no sacrifice and from no torture; *they* accepted fools whom I would not have engaged as hall porters. How often, mute and motionless, have I not admired the lady of my dreams, swaying the dance; given up my life in thought to one eternal caress, expressed all my hopes in a look, and laid before her, in my rapture, a young man's love, which should outstrip all fables. At some moments I was ready to barter my whole life for one single night. Well, as I could never find a listener for my impassioned proposals, eyes to rest my own upon, a heart made for my heart, I lived on in all the sufferings of impotent force that consumes itself; lacking either opportunity or courage or experience. I despaired, maybe, of making myself understood, or I feared

to be understood but too well; and yet the storm within me was ready to burst at every chance courteous look. In spite of my readiness to take the semblance of interest in look or word for a tenderer solicitude, I dared neither to speak nor to be silent seasonably. My words grew insignificant, and my silence stupid, by sheer stress of emotion. I was too ingenuous, no doubt, for that artificial life, led by candle-light, where every thought is expressed in conventional phases, or by words that fashion dictates; and not only so, I had not learned how to employ speech that says nothing, and silence that says a great deal. In short, I concealed the fires that consumed me, and with such a soul as women wish to find, with all the elevation of soul that they long for, and a mettle that fools plume themselves upon, all women have been cruelly treacherous to me.

"So in my simplicity I admired the heroes of this set when they bragged about their conquests, and never suspected them of lying. No doubt it was a mistake to wish for a love that springs for a word's sake; to expect to find in the heart of a vain, frivolous woman, greedy for luxury and intoxicated with vanity, the great sea of passion that surged tempestuously in my own breast. Oh! to feel that you were born to love, to make some woman's happiness, and yet to find not one, not even a noble and courageous Marceline, not so much as an old Marquise! Oh! to carry a treasure in your wallet, and not find even some child, or inquisitive young girl, to admire it! In my despair I often wished to kill myself."

"Finely tragical to-night!" cried Emile.

"Let me pass sentence on my life," Raphael answered. "If your friendship is not strong enough to bear with my elegy, if you cannot put up with half an hour's tedium for my sake, go to sleep! But, then, never ask again for the reason of the suicide that hangs over me, that comes nearer and calls to me, that I bow myself before. If you are to judge a man, you must know his secret thoughts, sorrows, and feelings; to know merely the outward events of a man's

life would only serve to make a chronological table—a fool's notion of history."

Emile was so much struck with the bitter tones in which these words were spoken that he began to pay close attention to Raphael, whom he watched with a bewildered expression.

"Now," continued the speaker, "all these things that befell me appear in a new light. The sequence of events that I once thought so unfortunate created the splendid powers of which, later, I became so proud. If I may believe you, I possess the power of readily expressing my thoughts, and I could take a forward place in the great field of knowledge; and is not this the result of scientific curiosity, of excessive application, and a love of reading which possessed me from the age of seven till my entry on life? The very neglect in which I was left, and the consequent habits of self-repression and self-concentration; did not these things teach me how to consider and reflect? Nothing in me was squandered in obedience to the exactions of the world, which humble the proudest soul and reduce it to a mere husk; and was it not this very fact that refined the emotional part of my nature till it became the perfected instrument of a loftier purpose than passionate desires? I remember watching the women who mistook me with all the insight of contemned love.

"I can see now that my natural sincerity must have been displeasing to them; women, perhaps, even require a little hypocrisy. And I, who in the same hour's space am alternately a man and a child, frivolous and thoughtful, free from bias and brimful of superstition, and oftentimes myself as much a woman as any of them; how should they do otherwise than take my simplicity for cynicism, my innocent candor for impudence? They found my knowledge tiresome; my feminine languor, weakness. I was held to be listless and incapable of love or of steady purpose; a too active imagination, that curse of poets, was no doubt the cause. My silence was idiotic; and as I dare say I alarmed them by my efforts to please, women one and all have condemned me. With tears and mortification, I bowed before the de-

cision of the world; but my distress was not barren. I determined to revenge myself on society; I would dominate the feminine intellect, and so have the feminine soul at my mercy; all eyes should be fixed upon me, when the servant at the door announced my name. I had determined from my childhood that I would be a great man; I said with André Chenier, as I struck my forehead, 'There is something underneath that!' I felt, I believed, the thought within me that I must express, the system I must establish, the knowledge I must interpret.

"Let me pour out my follies, dear Emile; to-day I am barely twenty-six years old, certain of dying unrecognized, and I have never been the lover of the woman I dreamed of possessing. Have we not all of us, more or less, believed in the reality of a thing because we wished it? I would never have a young man for my friend who did not place himself in dreams upon a pedestal, weave crowns for his head, and have complaisant mistresses. I myself would often be a general, nay, emperor; I have been a Byron, and then a nobody. After this sport on these pinnacles of human achievement, I became aware that all the difficulties and steeps of life were yet to face. My exuberant self-esteem came to my aid; I had that intense belief in my destiny, which perhaps amounts to genius in those who will not permit themselves to be distracted by contact with the world, as sheep that leave their wool on the briars of every thicket they pass by. I meant to cover myself with glory, and to work in silence for the mistress I hoped to have one day. Women for me were resumed into a single type, and this woman I looked to meet in the first that met my eyes; but in each and all I saw a queen, and as queens must make the first advances to their lovers, they must draw near to me —to me, so sickly, shy, and poor. For her, who should take pity on me, my heart held in store such gratitude over and beyond love that I had worshipped her her whole life long. Later, my observations have taught me bitter truths.

"In this way, dear Emile, I ran the risk of remaining

companionless for good. The incomprehensible bent of women's minds appears to lead them to see nothing but the weak points in a clever man, and the strong points of a fool. They feel the liveliest sympathy with the fool's good qualities, which perpetually flatter their own defects; while they find the man of talent hardly agreeable enough to compensate for his shortcomings. All capacity is a sort of intermittent fever, and no woman is anxious to share in its discomforts only; they look to find in their lovers the wherewithal to gratify their own vanity. It is themselves that they love in us! But the artist, poor and proud, along with his endowment of creative power, is furnished with an aggressive egotism! Everything about him is involved in I know not what whirlpool of his ideas, and even his mistress must gyrate along with them. How is a woman, spoiled with praise, to believe in the love of a man like that? Will she go to seek him out? That sort of lover has not the leisure to sit beside a sofa and give himself up to the sentimental simperings that women are so fond of, and on which the false and unfeeling pride themselves. He cannot spare the time from his work, and how can he afford to humble himself and go a-masquerading! I was ready to give my life once and for all, but I could not degrade it in detail. Besides, there is something indescribably paltry in a stock-broker's tactics, who runs on errands for some insipid affected woman; all this disgusts an artist. Love in the abstract is not enough for a great man in poverty; he has need of its utmost devotion. The frivolous creatures who spend their lives in trying on cashmeres, or make themselves into clothes-pegs to hang the fashions from, exact the devotion which is not theirs to give; for them, love means the pleasure of ruling and not of obeying. She who is really a wife, one in heart, flesh, and bone, must follow wherever he leads, in whom her life, her strength, her pride, and happiness are centred. Ambitious men need those Oriental women whose whole thought is given to the study of their requirements; for unhappiness means for them the incompatibility of their

means with their desires. But I, who took myself for a man of genius, must needs feel attracted by these very she-coxcombs. So, as I cherished ideas so different from those generally received; as I wished to scale the heavens without a ladder, was possessed of wealth that could not circulate, and of knowledge so wide and so imperfectly arranged and digested that it overtaxed my memory; as I had neither relations nor friends in the midst of this lonely and ghastly desert, a desert of paving stones, full of animation, life, and thought, wherein every one is worse than inimical, indifferent to wit; I made a very natural, if foolish resolve, which required such unknown impossibilities that my spirits rose. It was as if I had laid a wager with myself, for I was at once the player and the cards.

"This was my plan. The eleven hundred francs must keep life in me for three years—the time I allowed myself in which to bring to light a work which should draw attention to me, and make me either a name or a fortune. I exulted at the thought of living on bread and milk, like a hermit in the Thebaid, while I plunged into the world of books and ideas and so reached a lofty sphere beyond the tumult of Paris, a sphere of silent labor where I would entomb myself like a chrysalis to await a brilliant and splendid new birth. I imperilled my life in order to live. By reducing my requirements to real needs and the barest necessaries, I found that three hundred and sixty-five francs sufficed for a year of penury; and, in fact, I managed to exist on that slender sum, so long as I submitted to my own claustral discipline."

"Impossible!" cried Emile.

"I lived for nearly three years in that way," Raphael answered, with a kind of pride. "Let us reckon it out. Three sous for bread, two for milk, and three for cold meat, kept me from dying of hunger, and my mind in a state of peculiar lucidity. I have observed, as you know, the wonderful effects produced by diet upon the imagination. My lodgings cost me three sous daily; I burned three sous more

in oil at night; I did my own housework, and wore flannel shirts so as to reduce the laundress's bill to two sous per day. The money I spent yearly in coal, if divided up, never cost more than two sous for each day. I had three years' supply of clothing, and I only dressed when going out to some library or public lecture. These expenses, all told, only amounted to eighteen sous, so two were left over for emergencies. I cannot recollect, during that long period of toil, either crossing the Pont des Arts, or paying for water; I went out to fetch it every morning from the fountain in the Place Saint-Michel, at the corner of the Rue de Grès. Oh, I wore my poverty proudly. A man urged on toward a fair future walks through life like an innocent person to his death; he feels no shame about it.

"I would not think of illness. Like Aquilina, I faced the hospital without terror. I had not a moment's doubt of my health, and besides, the poor can only take to their beds to die. I cut my own hair till the day when an angel of love and kindness . . . But I do not want to anticipate the state of things that I shall reach later. You must simply know that I lived with one grand thought for a mistress, a dream, an illusion which deceives us all more or less at first. To-day I laugh at myself, at that self, holy perhaps and heroic, which is now no more. I have since had a closer view of society and the world, of our manners and customs, and seen the dangers of my innocent credulity and the superfluous nature of my fervent toil. Stores of that sort are quite useless to aspirants for fame. Light should be the baggage of seekers after fortune!

"Ambitious men spend their youth in rendering themselves worthy of patronage; it is their great mistake. While the foolish creatures are laying in stores of knowledge and energy, so that they shall not sink under the weight of responsible posts that recede from them, schemers come and go who are wealthy in words and destitute of ideas, astonish the ignorant, and creep into the confidence of those who have a little knowledge. While the first kind study, the

second march ahead; the one sort is modest, and the other impudent; the man of genius is silent about his own merit, but these schemers make a flourish of theirs, and they are bound to get on. It is so strongly to the interest of men in office to believe in ready-made capacity, and in brazen-faced merit, that it is downright childish of the learned to expect material rewards. I do not seek to paraphrase the commonplace moral, the song of songs that obscure genius is forever singing; I want to come, in a logical manner, by the reason of the frequent successes of mediocrity. Alas! study shows us such a mother's kindness that it would be a sin perhaps to ask any other reward of her than the pure and delightful pleasures with which she sustains her children.

"Often I remember soaking my bread in milk, as I sat by the window to take the fresh air; while my eyes wandered over a view of roofs—brown, gray, or red, slated or tiled, and covered with yellow or green mosses. At first the prospect may have seemed monotonous, but I very soon found peculiar beauties in it. Sometimes at night, streams of light through half-closed shutters would light up and color the dark abysses of this strange landscape. Sometimes the feeble lights of the street lamps sent up yellow gleams through the fog, and in each street dimly outlined the undulations of a crowd of roofs, like billows in a motionless sea. Very occasionally, too, a face appeared in this gloomy waste; above the flowers in some skyey garden I caught a glimpse of an old woman's crooked angular profile as she watered her nasturtiums; or, in a crazy attic window, a young girl, fancying herself quite alone as she dressed herself—a view of nothing more than a fair forehead and long tresses held above her by a pretty white arm.

"I liked to see the short-lived plant-life in the gutters—poor weeds that a storm soon washed away. I studied the mosses, with their colors revived by showers, or transformed by the sun into a brown velvet that fitfully caught the light. Such things as these formed my recreations—the passing poetic moods of daylight, the melancholy mists, sudden gleams

of sunlight, the silence and the magic of night, the mysteries of dawn, the smoke wreaths from each chimney; every chance event, in fact, in my curious world became familiar to me. I came to love this prison of my own choosing. This level Parisian prairie of roofs, beneath which lay populous abysses, suited my humor, and harmonized with my thoughts.

"Sudden descents into the world from the divine height of scientific meditation are very exhausting; and, besides, I had apprehended perfectly the bare life of the cloister. When I made up my mind to carry out this new plan of life, I looked for quarters in the most out-of-the-way parts of Paris. One evening, as I returned home to the Rue des Cordiers from the Place de l'Estrapade, I saw a girl of fourteen playing with a battledore at the corner of the Rue de Cluny; her winsome ways and laughter amused the neighbors. September was not yet over; it was warm and fine, so that women sat chatting before their doors as if it were a fete-day in some country town. At first I watched the charming expression of the girl's face and her graceful attitudes, her pose fit for a painter. It was a pretty sight. I looked about me, seeking to understand this blithe simplicity in the midst of Paris, and saw that the street was a blind alley and but little frequented. I remembered that Jean-Jacques had once lived here, and looked up the Hotel Saint-Quentin. Its dilapidated condition awakened hopes of a cheap lodging, and I determined to enter.

"I found myself in a room with a low ceiling; the candles, in classic-looking copper candlesticks, were set in a row under each key. The predominating cleanliness of the room made a striking contrast to the usual state of such places. This one was as neat as a bit of *genre;* there was a charming trimness about the blue coverlet, the cooking pots and furniture. The mistress of the house rose and came to me. She seemed to be about forty years of age; sorrows had left their traces on her features, and weeping had dimmed her eyes. I deferentially mentioned the amount I could pay; it seemed to cause her no surprise; she sought

out a key from the row, went up to the attics with me, and showed me a room that looked out on the neighboring roofs and courts; long poles with linen drying on them hung out of the window.

"Nothing could be uglier than this garret, awaiting its scholar, with its dingy yellow walls and odor of poverty. The roofing fell in a steep slope, and the sky was visible through chinks in the tiles. There was room for a bed, a table, and a few chairs, and beneath the highest point of the roof my piano could stand. Not being rich enough to furnish this cage (that might have been one of the *Piombi* of Venice), the poor woman had never been able to let it; and as I had saved from the recent sale the furniture that was in a fashion peculiarly mine I very soon came to terms with my landlady, and moved in on the following day.

"For three years I lived in this airy sepulchre, and worked unflaggingly day and night; and so great was the pleasure that study seemed to me the fairest theme and the happiest solution of life. The tranquillity and peace that a scholar needs is something as sweet and exhilarating as love. Unspeakable joys are showered on us by the exertion of our mental faculties; the quest of ideas, and the tranquil contemplation of knowledge; delights indescribable, because purely intellectual and impalpable to our senses. So we are obliged to use material terms to express the mysteries of the soul. The pleasure of striking out in some lonely lake of clear water, with forests, rocks, and flowers around, and the soft stirring of the warm breeze—all this would give, to those who knew them not, a very faint idea of the exultation with which my soul bathed itself in the beams of an unknown light, hearkened to the awful and uncertain voice of inspiration, as vision upon vision poured from some unknown source through my throbbing brain.

"No earthly pleasure can compare with the divine delight of watching the dawn of an idea in the space of abstractions, as it rises like the morning sun; an idea that, better still, attains gradually like a child to puberty and man's estate

Study lends a kind of enchantment to all our surroundings. The wretched desk covered with brown leather at which I wrote, my piano, bed, and armchair, the odd wall-paper and furniture, seemed to have for me a kind of life in them, and to be humble friends of mine and mute partakers of my destiny. How often have I confided my soul to them in a glance! A warped bit of beading often met my eyes, and suggested new developments—a striking proof of my system, or a felicitous word by which to render my all but inexpressible thought. By sheer contemplation of the things about me I discerned an expression and a character in each. If the setting sun happened to steal in through my narrow window, they would take new colors, fade or shine, grow dull or gay, and always amaze me with some new effect. These trifling incidents of a solitary life, which escape those preoccupied with outward affairs, make the solace of prisoners. And what was I but the captive of an idea, imprisoned in my system, but sustained also by the prospect of a brilliant future? At each obstacle that I overcame, I seemed to kiss the soft hands of a woman with a fair face, a wealthy, well-dressed woman, who should some day say softly, while she caressed my hair—

"'Poor angel, how thou hast suffered!'

"I had undertaken two great works—one a comedy that in a very short time must bring me wealth and fame, and an entry into those circles whither I wished to return, to exercise the royal privileges of a man of genius. You all saw nothing in that masterpiece but the blunder of a young man fresh from college, a babyish fiasco. Your jokes clipped the wings of a throng of illusions, which have never stirred since within me. You, dear Emile, alone brought soothing to the deep wounds that others had made in my heart. You alone will admire my 'Theory of the Will.' I devoted most of my time to that long work, for which I studied Oriental languages, physiology and anatomy. If I do not deceive myself, my labors will complete the task begun by Mesmer, Lavater, Gale, and Bichat, and open up new paths in science.

"There ends that fair life of mine, the daily sacrifice, the unrecognized silkworm's toil, that is, perhaps, its own sole recompense. Since attaining years of discretion, until the day when I finished my 'Theory,' I observed, learned, wrote, and read unintermittingly; my life was one long imposition, as schoolboys say. Though by nature effeminately attached to Oriental indolence, sensual in tastes, and a wooer of dreams, I worked incessantly, and refused to taste any of the enjoyments of Parisian life. Though a glutton, I became abstemious; and loving exercise and sea voyages as I did, and haunted by the wish to visit many countries, still child enough to play at ducks and drakes with pebbles over a pond, I led a sedentary life with a pen in my fingers. I liked talking, but I went to sit and mutely listen to professors who gave public lectures at the Bibliothèque or the Museum. I slept upon my solitary pallet like a Benedictine brother, though woman was my one chimera, a chimera that fled from me as I wooed it! In short, my life has been a cruel contradiction, a perpetual cheat. After that, judge a man!

"Sometimes my natural propensities broke out like a fire long smothered. I was debarred from the women whose society I desired, stripped of everything and lodged in an artist's garret, and by a sort of mirage or calenture I was surrounded by captivating mistresses. I drove through the streets of Paris, lolling on the soft cushions of a fine equipage. I plunged into dissipation, into corroding vice, I desired and possessed everything, for fasting had made me light-headed like the tempted Saint Anthony. Slumber, happily, would put an end at last to these devastating trances; and on the morrow Science would beckon me, smiling, and I was faithful to her. I imagine that women reputed virtuous must often fall a prey to these insane tempests of desire and passion, which rise in us in spite of ourselves. Such dreams have a charm of their own; they are something akin to evening gossip round the winter fire, when one sets out for some voyage in China. But what

becomes of virtue during these delicious excursions, when fancy overleaps all difficulties?

"During the first ten months of seclusion I led the life of poverty and solitude that I have described to you; I used to steal out unobserved every morning to buy my own provisions for the day; I tidied my room; I was at once master and servant, and played the Diogenes with incredible spirit. But afterward, while my hostess and her daughter watched my ways and behavior, scrutinized my appearance and divined my poverty, there could not but be some bonds between us; perhaps because they were themselves so very poor. Pauline, the charming child, whose latent and unconscious grace had, in a manner, brought me there, did me many services that I could not well refuse. All women fallen on evil days are sisters; they speak a common language; they have the same generosity—the generosity that possesses nothing, and so is lavish of its affection, of its time, and of its very self.

"Imperceptibly Pauline took me under her protection, and would do things for me. No kind of objection was made by her mother, whom I even surprised mending my linen; she blushed for the charitable occupation. In spite of myself, they took charge of me, and I accepted their services.

"In order to understand the peculiar condition of my mind, my preoccupation with work must be remembered, the tyranny of ideas, and the instinctive repugnance that a man who leads an intellectual life must ever feel for the material details of existence. Could I well repulse the delicate attentions of Pauline, who would noiselessly bring me my frugal repast, when she noticed that I had taken nothing for seven or eight hours? She had the tact of a woman and the inventiveness of a child; she would smile as she made sign to me that I must not see her. Ariel glided under my roof in the form of a sylph who foresaw every want of mine.

"One evening Pauline told me her story with touching simplicity. Her father had been a major in the horse gren-

adiers of the Imperial Guard. He had been taken prisoner by the Cossacks, at the passage of the Beresina; and when Napoleon later on proposed an exchange, the Russian authorities made search for him in Siberia in vain; he had escaped with a view of reaching India, and since then Mme. Gaudin, my landlady, could hear no news of her husband. Then came the disasters of 1814 and 1815; and, left alone and without resource, she had decided to let furnished lodgings in order to keep herself and her daughter.

"She always hoped to see her husband again. Her greatest trouble was about her daughter's education; the Princess Borghese was her Pauline's godmother; and Pauline must not be unworthy of the fair future promised by her imperial protectress. When Mme. Gaudin confided to me this heavy trouble that preyed upon her, she said, with sharp pain in her voice, 'I would give up the property and the scrap of paper that makes Gaudin a baron of the empire, and all our rights to the endowment of Wistchnau, if only Pauline could be brought up at Saint-Denis!' Her words struck me; now I could show my gratitude for the kindnesses expended on me by the two women; all at once the idea of offering to finish Pauline's education occurred to me; and the offer was made and accepted in the most perfect simplicity. In this way I came to have some hours of recreation. Pauline had natural aptitude; she learned so quickly that she soon surpassed me at the piano. As she became accustomed to think aloud in my presence, she unfolded all the sweet refinements of a heart that was opening itself out to life, as some flower-cup opens slowly to the sun. She listened to me, pleased and thoughtful, letting her dark velvet eyes rest upon me with a half smile in them; she repeated her lessons in soft and gentle tones, and showed childish glee when I was satisfied with her. Her mother grew more and more anxious every day to shield the young girl from every danger (for all the beauty promised in early life was developing in the crescent moon), and was glad to see her spend whole days indoors in study. My piano was the only one

she could use, and while I was out she practiced on it. When I came home, Pauline would be in my room, in her shabby dress, but her slightest movement revealed her slender figure in its attractive grace, in spite of the coarse materials that she wore. As with the heroine of the fable of 'Peau-d'Ane,' a dainty foot peeped out of the clumsy shoes. But all her wealth of girlish beauty was as lost upon me. I had laid commands upon myself to see a sister only in Pauline. I dreaded lest I should betray her mother's faith in me. I admired the lovely girl as if she had been a picture, or as the portrait of a dead mistress; she was at once my child and my statue. For me, another Pygmalion, the maiden with the hues of life and the living voice was to become a form of inanimate marble. I was very strict with her, but the more I made her feel my pedagogue's severity, the more gentle and submissive she grew.

"If a generous feeling strengthened me in my reserve and self-restraint, prudent considerations were not lacking besides. Integrity of purpose cannot, I think, fail to accompany integrity in money matters. To my mind, to become insolvent or to betray a woman is the same sort of thing. If you love a young girl, or allow yourself to be beloved by her, a contract is implied, and its conditions should be thoroughly understood. We are free to break with the woman who sells herself, but not with the young girl who has given herself to us and does not know the extent of her sacrifice. I must have married Pauline, and that would have been madness. Would it not have given over that sweet girlish heart to terrible misfortunes? My poverty made its selfish voice heard, and set an iron barrier between that gentle nature and mine. Besides, I am ashamed to say that I cannot imagine love in the midst of poverty. Perhaps this is a vitiation due to that malady of mankind called civilization; but a woman in squalid poverty would exert no fascination over me, were she attractive as Homer's Galatea, the fair Helen.

"Ah, *vive l'amour!* But let it be in silk and cashmere, surrounded with the luxury which so marvellously embel-

lishes it; for is it not perhaps itself a luxury? I enjoy making havoc with an elaborate erection of scented hair; I like to crush flowers, to disarrange and crease a smart toilet at will. A bizarre attraction lies for me in burning eyes that blaze through a lace veil, like flame through cannon smoke. My way of love would be to mount by a silken ladder, in the silence of a winter night. And what bliss to reach, all powdered with snow, a perfumed room, with hangings of painted silk, to find a woman there, who likewise shakes away the snow from her; for what other name can be found for the white muslin wrappings that vaguely define her, like some angel form issuing from a cloud! And then I wish for furtive joys, for the security of audacity. I want to see once more that woman of mystery, but let it be in the throng, dazzling, unapproachable, adored on all sides, dressed in laces and ablaze with diamonds, laying her commands upon every one; so exalted above us that she inspires awe, and none dares to pay his homage to her.

"She gives me a stolen glance, amid her court, a look that exposes the unreality of all this; that resigns for me the world and all men in it! Truly I have scorned myself for a passion for a few yards of lace, velvet, and fine lawn, and the hairdresser's feats of skill; a love of wax-lights, a carriage and a title, a heraldic coronet painted on window panes, or engraved by a jeweller; in short, a liking for all that is adventitious and least woman in woman. I have scorned and reasoned with myself, but all in vain.

"A woman of rank with her subtle smile, her high-born air, and self-esteem captivates me. The barriers she erects between herself and the world waken my vanity, a good half of love. There would be more relish for me in bliss that all others envied. If my mistress does nothing that other women do, and neither lives nor conducts herself like them, wears a cloak that they cannot attain, breathes a perfume of her own, then she seems to rise far above me. The further she rises from earth, even in the earthlier aspects of love, the fairer she becomes for me.

"Luckily for me we have had no queen in France these twenty years, for I should have fallen in love with her. A woman must be wealthy to acquire the manners of a princess. What place had Pauline among these far-fetched imaginings? Could she bring me the love that is death, that brings every faculty into play, the nights that are paid for by life? We hardly die, I think, for an insignificant girl who gives herself to us; and I could never extinguish these feelings and poet's dreams within me. I was born for an inaccessible love, and fortune has overtopped my desire.

"How often have I set satin shoes on Pauline's tiny feet, confined her form, slender as a young poplar, in a robe of gauze, and thrown a loose scarf about her as I saw her tread the carpets in her mansion and led her out to her splendid carriage! In such guise I should have adored her. I endowed her with all the pride she lacked, stripped her of her virtues, her natural, simple charm, and frank smile, in order to plunge her heart in our Styx of depravity that makes invulnerable, load her with our crimes, make of her the fantastical doll of our drawing-rooms, the frail being who lies abed in the morning and comes to life again at night with the dawn of tapers. Pauline was fresh-hearted and affectionate—I would have had her cold and formal.

"In the last days of my frantic folly, memory brought Pauline before me, as it brings the scenes of our childhood, and made me pause to muse over past delicious moments that softened my heart. I sometimes saw her, the adorable girl who sat quietly sewing at my table, wrapped in her meditations; the faint light from my window fell upon her and was reflected back in silvery rays from her thick black hair; sometimes I heard her young laughter, or the rich tones of her voice singing some canzonet that she composed without effort. And often my Pauline seemed to grow greater, as music flowed from her, and her face bore a striking resemblance to the noble one that Carlo Dolci chose for the type of Italy. My cruel memory brought her back athwart the dissipations of my existence, like a

remorse, or a symbol of purity. But let us leave the poor child to her own fate. Whatever her troubles may have been, at any rate I protected her from a menacing tempest —I did not drag her down into my hell.

"Until last winter I led the uneventful studious life of which I have given you some faint picture. In the earliest days of December, 1829, I came across Rastignac, who, in spite of the shabby condition of my wardrobe, linked his arm in mine, and inquired into my affairs with a quite brotherly interest. Caught by his engaging manner, I gave him a brief account of my life and hopes; he began to laugh, and treated me as a mixture of a man of genius and a fool. His Gascon accent and knowledge of the world, the easy life his clever management procured for him, all produced an irresistible effect upon me. I should die an unrecognized failure in a hospital, Rastignac said, and be buried in a pauper's grave. He talked of charlatanism. Every man of genius was a charlatan, he plainly showed me in that pleasant way of his that makes him so fascinating. He insisted that I must be out of my senses, and would be my own death, if I lived on alone in the Rue des Cordiers. According to him, I ought to go into society, to accustom people to the sound of my name, and to rid myself of the simple title of 'Monsieur' which sits but ill on a great man in his lifetime.

" 'Those who know no better,' he cried, 'call this sort of business *scheming*, and moral people condemn it for a "dissipated life." We need not stop to look at what people think, but see the results. You work, you say? Very good, but nothing will ever come of that. Now, I am ready for anything and fit for nothing. As lazy as a lobster? Very likely, but I succeed everywhere. I go out into society, I push myself forward, the others make way before me; I brag and am believed; I incur debts which somebody else pays! Dissipation, dear boy, is a methodical policy. The life of a man who deliberately runs through his fortune often becomes a business speculation; his friends, his pleas-

ures, patrons, and acquaintances are his capital. Suppose a merchant runs a risk of a million, for twenty years he can neither sleep, eat, nor amuse himself; he is brooding over his million; it makes him run about all over Europe; he worries himself, goes to the devil in every way that man has invented. Then comes a liquidation, such as I have seen myself, which very often leaves him penniless and without a reputation or a friend. The spendthrift, on the other hand, takes life as a serious game, and sees his horses run. He loses his capital, perhaps, but he stands a chance of being nominated Receiver-General, of making a wealthy marriage, or of an appointment as attaché to a minister or ambassador; and he has his friends left and his name, and he never wants money. He knows the standing of everybody, and uses every one for his own benefit. Is this logical, or am I a madman after all? Haven't you there all the moral of the comedy that goes on every day in this world? . . . Your work is completed,' he went on after a pause; 'you are immensely clever! Well, you have only arrived at my starting-point. Now, you had better look after its success yourself; it is the surest way. You will make allies in every clique, and secure applause beforehand. I mean to go halves in your glory myself; I shall be the jeweller who set the diamonds in your crown. Come here to-morrow evening, by way of a beginning. I will introduce you to a house where all Paris goes, all *our* Paris, that is—the Paris of exquisites, millionnaires, celebrities, all the folk who talk gold like Chrysostom. When they have taken up a book, that book becomes the fashion; and if it is something really good for once, they will have declared it to be a work of genius without knowing it. If you have any sense, my dear fellow, you will insure the success of your "Theory," by a better understanding of the theory of success. To-morrow evening you shall go to see that queen of the moment—the beautiful Countess Fœdora. . . .'

"'I have never heard of her. . . .'

"'You Hottentot!' laughed Rastignac; 'you do not know

Fœdora? A great match with an income of nearly eighty thousand livres, who has taken a fancy to nobody, or else no one has taken a fancy to her. A sort of feminine enigma, a half Russian Parisienne, or a half Parisian Russian. All the romantic productions that never get published are brought out at her house; she is the handsomest woman in Paris, and the most gracious! You are not even a Hottentot; you are something between the Hottentot and the beast. . . . Good-by till to-morrow.'

"He swung round on his heel and made off without waiting for my answer. It never occurred to him that a reasoning being could refuse an introduction to Fœdora. How can the fascination of a name be explained? FŒDORA haunted me like some evil thought, with which you seek to come to terms. A voice said in me, 'You are going to see Fœdora!' In vain I reasoned with that voice, saying that it lied to me; all my arguments were defeated by the name 'Fœdora.' Was not the name, and even the woman herself, the symbol of all my desires, and the object of my life?

"The name called up recollections of the conventional glitter of the world, the upper world of Paris with its brilliant fetes and the tinsel of its vanities. The woman brought before me all the problems of passion on which my mind continually ran. Perhaps it was neither the woman nor the name, but my own propensities, that sprang up within me and tempted me afresh. Here was the Countess Fœdora, rich and loveless, proof against the temptations of Paris; was not this woman the very incarnation of my hopes and visions? I fashioned her for myself, drew her in fancy, and dreamed of her. I could not sleep that night; I became her lover; I over-brimmed a few hours with a whole lifetime —a lover's lifetime; the experience of its prolific delights burned me.

"The next day I could not bear the tortures of delay; I borrowed a novel, and spent the whole day over it, so that I could not possibly think nor keep account of the time till

night. Fœdora's name echoed through me even as I read, but only as a distant sound; though it could be heard, it was not troublesome. Fortunately, I owned a fairly creditable black coat and a white waistcoat; of all my fortune there now remained about thirty francs, which I had distributed about among my clothes and in my drawers, so as to erect between my whims and the spending of a five-franc piece a thorny barrier of search, and an adventurous peregrination round my room. While I was dressing, I dived about for my money in an ocean of papers. This scarcity of specie will give you some idea of the value of that squandered upon gloves and cab-hire; a month's bread disappeared at one fell swoop. Alas! money is always forthcoming for our caprices; we only grudge the cost of things that are useful or necessary. We recklessly fling gold to an opera-dancer, and haggle with a tradesman whose hungry family must wait for the settlement of our bill. How many men are there that wear a coat that cost a hundred francs, and carry a diamond in the head of their cane, and dine for twenty-five *sous* for all that! It seems as though we could never pay enough for the pleasures of vanity.

"Rastignac, punctual to his appointment, smiled at the transformation, and joked about it. On the way he gave me benevolent advice as to my conduct with the countess; he described her as mean, vain, and suspicious; but though mean, she was ostentatious, her vanity was transparent, and her mistrust good-humored.

"'You know I am pledged,' he said, 'and what I should lose, too, if I tried a change in love. So my observation of Fœdora has been quite cool and disinterested, and my remarks must have some truth in them. I was looking to your future when I thought of introducing you to her; so mind very carefully what I am about to say. She has a terrible memory. She is clever enough to drive a diplomatist wild; she would know it at once if he spoke the truth. Between ourselves, I fancy that her marriage was not recognized by the Emperor, for the Russian ambassador began to smile

when I spoke of her; he does not receive her either, and only bows very coolly if he meets her in the Bois. For all that, she is in Madame de Serizy's set, and visits Mesdames de Nucingen and de Restaud. There is no cloud over her here in France; the Duchesse de Carigliano, the most strait-laced maréchale in the whole Bonapartist coterie, often goes to spend the summer with her at her country house. Plenty of young fops, sons of peers of France, have offered her a title in exchange for her fortune, and she has politely declined them all. Her susceptibilities, may be, are not to be touched by anything less than a count. Aren't you a marquis? Go ahead if you fancy her. This is what you may call receiving your instructions.'

"His raillery made me think that Rastignac wished to joke and excite my curiosity, so that I was in a paroxysm of my extemporized passion by the time that we stopped before a peristyle full of flowers. My heart beat and my color rose as we went up the great carpeted staircase, and I noticed about me all the studied refinements of English comfort; I was infatuatedly *bourgeois;* I forgot my origin and all my personal and family pride. Alas! I had but just left a garret, after three years of poverty, and I could not just then set the treasures there acquired above such trifles as these. Nor could I rightly estimate the worth of the vast intellectual capital which turns to riches at the moment when opportunity comes within our reach, opportunity that does not overwhelm, because study has prepared us for the struggles of public life.

"I found a woman of about twenty-two years of age; she was of average height, was dressed in white, and held a feather fire-screen in her hand; a group of men stood around her. She rose at the sight of Rastignac, and came toward us with a gracious smile and a musically-uttered compliment, prepared no doubt beforehand, for me. Our friend had spoken of me as a rising man, and his clever way of making the most of me had procured me this flattering reception. I was confused by the attention that

every one paid to me; but Rastignac had luckily mentioned my modesty. I was brought in contact with scholars, men of letters, ex-ministers, and peers of France. The conversation, interrupted a while by my coming, was resumed. I took courage, feeling that I had a reputation to maintain, and without abusing my privilege, I spoke when it fell to me to speak, trying to state the questions at issue in words more or less profound, witty or trenchant, and I made a certain sensation. Rastignac was a prophet for the thousandth time in his life. As soon as the gathering was large enough to restore freedom to individuals, he took my arm, and we went round the rooms.

"'Don't look as if you were too much struck by the princess,' he said, 'or she will guess your object in coming to visit her.'

"The rooms were furnished in excellent taste. Each apartment had a character of its own, as in wealthy English houses; and the silken hangings, the style of the furniture, and the ornaments, even the most trifling, were all subordinated to the original idea. In a gothic boudoir the doors were concealed by tapestried curtains, and the panelling by hangings; the clock and the pattern of the carpet were made to harmonize with the gothic surroundings. The ceiling, with its carved cross-beams of brown wood, was full of charm and originality; the panels were beautifully wrought; nothing disturbed the general harmony of the scheme of decoration, not even the windows with their rich colored glass. I was surprised by the extensive knowledge of decoration that some artist had brought to bear on a little modern room, it was so pleasant and fresh, and not heavy, but subdued with its dead gold hues. It had all the vague sentiment of a German ballad; it was a retreat fit for some romance of 1827, perfumed by the exotic flowers set in their stands. Another apartment in the suite was a gilded reproduction of the Louis Quatorze period, with modern paintings on the walls in odd but pleasant contrast.

"'You would not be so badly lodged,' was Rastignac's

slightly sarcastic comment. 'It is captivating, isn't it?' he added, smiling as he sat down. Then suddenly he rose, and led me by the hand into a bedroom, where the softened light fell upon the bed under its canopy of muslin and white watered silk—a couch for a young fairy betrothed to one of the genii.

" 'Isn't it wantonly bad taste, insolent and unbounded coquetry,' he said, lowering his voice, 'that allows us to see this throne of love? She gives herself to no one, and anybody may leave his card here. If I were not committed, I should like to see her at my feet all tears and submission.'

" 'Are you so certain of her virtue?'

" 'The boldest and even the cleverest adventurers among us acknowledge themselves defeated, and continue to be her lovers and devoted friends. Isn't that woman a puzzle?'

"His words seemed to intoxicate me; I had jealous fears already of the past. I leaped for joy, and hurried back to the countess, whom I had seen in the gothic boudoir. She stopped me by a smile, made me sit beside her, and talked about my work, seeming to take the greatest interest in it, and all the more when I set forth my theories amusingly, instead of adopting the formal language of a professor for their explanation. It seemed to divert her to be told that the human will was a material force like steam; that in the moral world nothing could resist its power if a man taught himself to concentrate it, to economize it, and to project continually its fluid mass in given directions upon other souls. Such a man, I said, could modify all things relatively to man, even the peremptory laws of nature. The questions Fœdora raised showed a certain keenness of intellect. I took a pleasure in deciding some of them in her favor, in order to flatter her; then I confuted her feminine reasoning with a word, and roused her curiosity by drawing her attention to an everyday matter—to sleep, a thing so apparently commonplace, that in reality is an insoluble problem for science. The countess sat in silence for a moment when I told her that our ideas were complete organic beings, existing in an in-

visible world, and influencing our destinies; and for witnesses I cited the opinions of Descartes, Diderot, and Napoleon, who had directed, and still directed, all the currents of the age.

"So I had the honor of amusing this woman; she asked me to come to see her when she left me; giving me *les grande entrees*, in the language of the court. Whether it was by dint of substituting polite formulas for genuine expressions of feeling, a commendable habit of mine, or because Fœdora hailed in me a coming celebrity, an addition to her learned menagerie; for some reason I thought I had pleased her. I called all my previous physiological studies and knowledge of woman to my aid, and minutely scrutinized this singular person and her ways all the evening. I concealed myself in the embrasure of a window, and sought to discover her thoughts from her bearing. I studied the tactics of the mistress of the house, as she came and went, sat and chatted, beckoned to this one or that, asked questions, listened to the answers, as she leaned against the frame of the door; I detected a languid charm in her movements, a grace in the flutterings of her dress, remarked the nature of the feelings she so powerfully excited, and became very incredulous as to her virtue. If Fœdora would none of love to-day, she had had strong passions at some time; past experience of pleasure showed itself in the attitudes she chose in conversation, in her coquettish way of leaning against the panel behind her, she seemed scarcely able to stand alone, and yet ready for flight from too bold a glance. There was a kind of eloquence about her lightly folded arms, which, even for benevolent eyes, breathed sentiment. Her fresh red lips sharply contrasted with her brilliantly pale complexion. Her brown hair brought out all the golden color in her eyes, in which blue streaks mingled as in Florentine marble; their expression seemed to increase the significance of her words. A studied grace lay in the charms of her bodice. Perhaps a rival might have found the lines of the thick eyebrows, which almost met, a little

hard; or found a fault in the almost invisible down that covered her features. I saw the signs of passion everywhere, written on those Italian eyelids, on the splendid shoulders worthy of the Venus of Milo, on her features, in the darker shade of down above a somewhat thick under-lip. She was not merely a woman, but a romance. The whole blended harmony of lines, the feminine luxuriance of her frame, and its passionate promise, were subdued by a constant inexplicable reserve and modesty at variance with everything else about her. It needed an observation as keen as my own to detect such signs as these in her character. To explain myself more clearly; there were two women in Fœdora, divided perhaps by the line between head and body: the one, the head alone, seemed to be susceptible, and the other phlegmatic. She prepared her glance before she looked at you, something unspeakably mysterious, some inward convulsion seemed revealed by her glittering eyes.

"So, to be brief, either my imperfect moral science had left me a good deal to learn in the moral world, or a lofty soul dwelt in the countess, lent to her face those charms that fascinated and subdued us, and gave her an ascendency only the more complete because it comprehended a sympathy of desire.

"I went away completely enraptured with this woman, dazzled by the luxury around her, gratified in every faculty of my soul—noble and base, good and evil. When I felt myself so excited, eager, and elated, I thought I understood the attraction that drew thither those artists, diplomatists, men in office, those stock-jobbers incased in triple brass. They came, no doubt, to find in her society the delirious emotion that now thrilled through every fibre in me, throbbing through my brain, setting the blood a-tingle in every vein, fretting even the tiniest nerve. And she had given herself to none, so as to keep them all. A woman is a coquette so long as she knows not love.

"'Well,' I said to Rastignac, 'they married her, or sold

her perhaps, to some old man, and recollections of her first marriage have caused her aversion for love.'

"I walked home from the Faubourg St. Honoré, where Fœdora lived. Almost all the breadth of Paris lies between her mansion and the Rue des Cordiers, but the distance seemed short, in spite of the cold. And I was to lay siege to Fœdora's heart, in winter, and a bitter winter, with only thirty francs in my possession, and such a distance as that lay between us! Only a poor man knows what such a passion costs in cab-hire, gloves, linen, tailor's bills, and the like. If the Platonic stage lasts a little too long, the affair grows ruinous. As a matter of fact, there is many a Lauzun among students of law who finds it impossible to approach a lady-love living on a first floor. And I, sickly, thin, poorly dressed, wan and pale as any artist convalescent after a work, how could I compete with other young men, curled, handsome, smart, outcravating Croatia; wealthy men, equipped with tilburys, and armed with assurance?

" 'Bah, death or Fœdora!' I cried, as I went round by a bridge; 'my fortune lies in Fœdora.'

"That gothic boudoir and Louis Quatorze salon came before my eyes. I saw the countess again in her white dress with its large graceful sleeves, and all the fascinations of her form and movements. These pictures of Fœdora and her luxurious surroundings haunted me even in my bare, cold garret, when at last I reached it, as dishevelled as any naturalist's wig. The contrast suggested evil counsel; in such a way crimes are conceived. I cursed my honest, self-respecting poverty, my garret where such teeming fancies had stirred within me. I trembled with fury, I reproached God, the devil, social conditions, my own father, the whole universe, indeed, with my fate and my misfortunes. I went hungry to bed, muttering ludicrous imprecations, but fully determined to win Fœdora. Her heart was my last ticket in the lottery, my fortune depended upon it.

"I spare you the history of my earlier visits, to reach the

drama the sooner. In my efforts to appeal to her, I essayed to engage her intellect and her vanity on my side; in order to secure her love, I gave her any quantity of reasons for increasing her self-esteem; I never left her in a state of indifference; women like emotions at any cost, I gave them to her in plenty; I would rather have had her angry with me than indifferent.

"At first, urged by a strong will and a desire for her love, I assumed a little authority, but my own feelings grew stronger and mastered me; I relapsed into truth, I lost my head, and fell desperately in love.

"I am not very sure what we mean by the word love in our poetry and our talk; but I know that I have never found in all the ready rhetorical phrases of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, in whose room perhaps I was lodging; nor among the feeble inventions of two centuries of our literature, nor in any picture that Italy has produced, a representation of the feelings that expanded all at once in my double nature. The view of the lake of Bienne, some music of Rossini's, the Madonna of Murillo's now in the possession of General Soult, Lescombat's letters, a few sayings scattered through collections of anecdotes; but most of all the prayers of religious ecstatics, and passages in our *fabliaux*—these things alone have power to carry me back to the divine heights of my first love.

"Nothing expressed in human language, no thought reproducible in color, marble, sound, or articulate speech, could ever render the force, the truth, the completeness, the suddenness with which love awoke in me. To speak of art is to speak of illusion. Love passes through endless transformations before it passes forever into our existence and makes it glow with its own color of flame. The process is imperceptible, and baffles the artist's analysis. Its moans and complaints are tedious to an uninterested spectator. One would need to be very much in love to share the furious transports of Lovelace, as one reads 'Clarissa Harlowe.' Love is like some fresh spring, that leaves its

cresses, its gravel bed and flowers, to become first a stream and then a river, changing its aspect and its nature as it flows to plunge itself in some boundless ocean, where restricted natures only find monotony, but where great souls are ingulfed in endless contemplation.

"How can I dare to describe the hues of fleeting emotions, the nothings beyond all price, the spoken accents that beggar language, the looks that hold more than all the wealth of poetry? Not one of the mysterious scenes that draw us insensibly nearer and nearer to a woman, but has depths in it which can swallow up all the poetry that ever was written. How can the inner life and mystery that stirs in our souls penetrate through our glozes, when we have not even words to describe the visible and outward mysteries of beauty? What enchantment steeped me for how many hours in unspeakable rapture, filled with the sight of Her! What made me happy? I know not. That face of hers overflowed with light at such times; it seemed in some way to glow with it; the outlines of her face, with the scarcely perceptible down on its delicate surface, shone with a beauty belonging to the far distant horizon that melts into the sunlight. The light of day seemed to caress her as she mingled in it; rather it seemed that the light of her eyes was brighter than the daylight itself; or some shadow passing over that fair face made a kind of change there, altering its hues and its expression. Some thought would often seem to glow on her white brows; her eyes appeared to dilate, and her eyelids trembled; a smile rippled over her features; the living coral of her lips grew full of meaning as they closed and unclosed; an indistinguishable something in her hair made brown shadows on her fair temples: in each new phase Fœdora spoke. Every slight variation in her beauty made a new pleasure for my eyes, disclosed charms my heart had never known before; I tried to read a separate emotion or a hope in every change that passed over her face. This mute converse passed between soul and soul, like sound and answering echo; and the short-lived delights then showered upon me have left indelible

impressions behind. Her voice would cause a frenzy in me that I could hardly understand. I could have copied the example of some prince of Lorraine, and held a live coal in the hollow of my hand, if her fingers passed caressingly through my hair the while. I felt no longer mere admiration and desire: I was under the spell; I had met my destiny. When back again under my own roof, I still vaguely saw Fœdora in her own home, and had some indefinable share in her life; if she felt ill, I suffered too. The next day I used to say to her—'You were not well yesterday.'

"How often has she not stood before me, called by the power of ecstasy, in the silence of the night! Sometimes she would break in upon me like a ray of light, make me drop my pen, and put science and study to flight in grief and alarm, as she compelled my admiration by the alluring pose I had seen but a short time before. Sometimes I went to seek her in the spirit world, and would bow down to her as to a hope, entreating her to let me hear the silver sounds of her voice, and I would wake at length in tears.

"Once, when she had promised to go to the theatre with me, she took it suddenly into her head to refuse to go out, and begged me to leave her alone. I was in such despair over the perversity which cost me a day's work, and (if I must confess it) my last shilling as well, that I went alone where she was to have been, desiring to see the play she had wished to see. I had scarcely seated myself when an electric shock went through me. A voice told me, 'She is here!' I looked round, and saw the countess hidden in the shadow at the back of her box in the first tier. My look did not waver; my eyes saw her at once with incredible clearness; my soul hovered about her life like an insect above its flower. How had my senses received this warning? There is something in these inward tremors that shallow people find astonishing, but the phenomena of our inner consciousness are produced as simply as those of external vision; so I was not surprised, but much vexed. My studies of our mental faculties, so little understood, helped me at any rate to find in

my own excitement some living proofs of my theories. There was something exceedingly odd in this combination of lover and man of science, of downright idolatry of a woman with the love of knowledge. The causes of the lover's despair were highly interesting to the man of science; and the exultant lover, on the other hand, put science far away from him in his joy. Fœdora saw me, and grew grave: I annoyed her. I went to her box during the first interval, and, finding her alone, I stayed there. Although we had not spoken of love, I foresaw an explanation. I had not told her my secret, still there was a kind of understanding between us. She used to tell me her plans for amusement, and on the previous evening had asked with friendly eagerness if I meant to call next day. After any witticism of hers, she would give me an inquiring glance, as if she had sought to please me alone by it. She would soothe me if I was vexed; and if she pouted, I had in some sort a right to ask an explanation. Before she would pardon any blunder, she would keep me a suppliant for long. All these things that we so relished were so many lovers' quarrels. What arch grace she threw into it all! and what happiness it was to me!

"But now we stood before each other as strangers, with the close relation between us both suspended. The countess was glacial: a presentiment of trouble filled me.

"'Will you come home with me?' she said, when the play was over.

"There had been a sudden change in the weather, and sleet was falling in showers as we went out. Fœdora's carriage was unable to reach the doorway of the theatre. At the sight of a well-dressed woman about to cross the street, a commissionaire held an umbrella above us, and stood waiting at the carriage-door for his tip. I would have given ten years of life just then for a couple of halfpence, but I had not a penny. All the man in me and all my vainest susceptibilities were wrung with an infernal pain. The words, 'I haven't a penny about me, my good fellow!' came from me in the hard voice of thwarted passion; and yet I was that

man's brother in misfortunes, as I knew too well; and once I had so lightly paid away seven hundred thousand francs! The footman pushed the man aside, and the horses sprang forward. As we returned, Fœdora, in real or feigned abstraction, answered all my questions curtly and by monosyllables. I said no more; it was a hateful moment. When we reached her house, we seated ourselves by the hearth, and when the servant had stirred the fire and left us alone, the countess turned to me with an inexplicable expression, and spoke. Her manner was almost solemn.

" 'Since my return to France, more than one young man, tempted by my money, has made proposals to me which would have satisfied my pride. I have come across men, too, whose attachment was so deep and sincere that they might have married me even if they had found me the penniless girl I used to be. Besides these, Monsieur de Valentin, you must know that new titles and newly-acquired wealth have been also offered to me, and that I have never received again any of those who were so ill advised as to mention love to me. If my regard for you was but slight, I would not give you this warning, which is dictated by friendship rather than by pride. A woman lays herself open to a rebuff of some kind, if she imagines herself to be loved, and declines, before it is uttered, to listen to language which in its nature implies a compliment. I am well acquainted with the parts played by Arsinoe and Araminta, and with the sort of answer I might look for under such circumstances; but I hope to-day that I shall not find myself misconstrued by a man of no ordinary character, because I have frankly spoken my mind.'

"She spoke with the cool self-possession of some attorney or solicitor explaining the nature of a contract or the conduct of a lawsuit to a client. There was not the least sign of feeling in the clear soft tones of her voice. Her steady face and dignified bearing seemed to me now full of diplomatic reserve and coldness. She had planned this scene, no doubt, and carefully chosen her words beforehand. Oh, my

friend, there are women who take pleasure in piercing hearts, and deliberately plunge the dagger back again into the wound; such women as these cannot but be worshipped, for such women either love or would fain be loved. A day comes when they make amends for all the pain they gave us; they repay us for the pangs, the keenness of which they recognize, in joys a hundred-fold, even as God, they tell us, recompenses our good works. Does not their perversity spring from the strength of their feelings? But to be so tortured by a woman, who slaughters you with indifference! was not the suffering hideous?

"Fœdora did not know it, but in that minute she trampled all my hopes beneath her feet; she maimed my life and she blighted my future with the cool indifference and unconscious barbarity of an inquisitive child who plucks its wings from a butterfly.

" 'Later on,' resumed Fœdora, 'you will learn, I hope, the stability of the affection that I keep for my friends. You will always find that I have devotion and kindness for them. I would give my life to serve my friends; but you could only despise me, if I allowed them to make love to me without return. That is enough. You are the only man to whom I have spoken such words as these last.'

"At first I could not speak, or master the tempest that arose within me; but I soon repressed my emotions in the depths of my soul, and began to smile.

" 'If I own that I love you,' I said, 'you will banish me at once; if I plead guilty to indifference, you will make me suffer for it. Women, magistrates, and priests never quite lay the gown aside. Silence is non-committal; be pleased then, madame, to approve my silence. You must have feared, in some degree, to lose me, or I should not have received this friendly admonition; and with that thought my pride ought to be satisfied. Let us banish all personal considerations. You are perhaps the only woman with whom I could discuss rationally a resolution so contrary to the laws of nature. Considered with regard to your spe-

cies, you are a prodigy. Now let us investigate, in good faith, the causes of this psychological anomaly. Does there exist in you, as in many women, a certain pride in self, a love of your own loveliness, a refinement of egoism which makes you shudder at the idea of belonging to another; is it the thought of resigning your own will and submitting to a superiority, though only of convention, which displeases you? You would seem to me a thousand times the fairer for it. Can love formerly have brought you suffering? You probably set some value on your dainty figure and graceful appearance, and may perhaps wish to avoid the disfigurements of maternity. Is not this one of your strongest reasons for refusing a too importunate love? Some natural defect perhaps makes you insusceptible in spite of yourself? Do not be angry; my study, my inquiry is absolutely dispassionate. Some are born blind, and nature may easily have formed women who in like manner are blind, deaf, and dumb to love. You are really an interesting subject for medical investigation. You do not know your value. You feel perhaps a very legitimate distaste for mankind; in that I quite concur—to me they all seem ugly and detestable. And you are right,' I added, feeling my heart swell within me; 'how can you do otherwise than despise us? There is not a man living who is worthy of you.'

"I will not repeat all the biting words with which I ridiculed her. In vain; my bitterest sarcasms and keenest irony never made her wince nor elicited a sign of vexation. She heard me, with the customary smile upon her lips and in her eyes, the smile that she wore as a part of her clothing, and that never varied for friends, for mere acquaintances, or for strangers.

" 'Isn't it very nice of me to allow you to dissect me like this?' she said at last, as I came to a temporary standstill, and looked at her in silence. 'You see,' she went on, laughing, 'that I have no foolish over-sensitiveness about my friendship. Many a woman would shut her door on you by way of punishing you for your impertinence.'

"'You could banish me without needing to give me the reasons for your harshness.' As I spoke I felt that I could kill her if she dismissed me.

"'You are mad,' she said, smiling still.

"'Did you never think,' I went on, 'of the effects of passionate love? A desperate man has often murdered his mistress.'

"'It is better to die than to live in misery,' she said coolly. 'Such a man as that would run through his wife's money, desert her, and leave her at last in utter wretchedness.'

"This calm calculation dumfounded me. The gulf between us was made plain; we could never understand each other.

"'Good-by,' I said proudly.

"'Good-by, till to-morrow,' she answered, with a little friendly bow.

"For a moment's space I hurled at her in a glance all the love I must forego; she stood there with that banal smile of hers, the detestable chill smile of a marble statue, with none of the warmth in it that it seemed to express. Can you form any idea, my friend, of the pain that overcame me on the way home through rain and snow, across a league of icy-sheeted quays, without a hope left? Oh, to think that she not only had not guessed my poverty, but believed me to be as wealthy as she was, and likewise borne as softly over the rough ways of life! What failure and deceit! It was no mere question of money now, but of the fate of all that lay within me.

"I went at haphazard, going over the words of our strange conversation with myself. I got so thoroughly lost in my reflections that I ended by doubts as to the actual value of words and ideas. But I loved her all the same; I loved this woman with the untouched heart that might surrender at any moment—a woman who daily disappointed the expectations of the previous evening, by appearing as a new mistress on the morrow.

"As I passed under the gateway of the Institute, a fevered thrill ran through me. I remembered that I was fasting, and that I had not a penny. To complete the measure of my misfortune, my hat was spoiled by the rain. How was I to appear in the drawing-room of a woman of fashion with an unpresentable hat? I had always cursed the inane and stupid custom that compels us to exhibit the lining of our hats, and to keep them always in our hands; but with anxious care I had so far kept mine in a precarious state of efficiency. It had been neither strikingly new, nor utterly shabby, neither napless nor over-glossy, and might have passed for the hat of a frugally given owner; but its artificially prolonged existence had now reached the final stage, it was crumpled, forlorn, and completely ruined, a downright rag, a fitting emblem of its master. My painfully preserved elegance must collapse for want of thirty sous.

"What unrecognized sacrifices I had made in the past three months for Fœdora! How often I had given the price of a week's sustenance to see her for a moment! To leave my work and go without food was the least of it! I must traverse the streets of Paris without getting splashed, run to escape showers, and reach her rooms at last, as neat and spruce as any of the coxcombs about her. For a poet and a distracted wooer the difficulties of this task were endless. My happiness, the course of my love, might be affected by a speck of mud upon my only white waistcoat! Oh, to miss the sight of her because I was wet through and bedraggled, and had not so much as five sous to give to a shoeblack for removing the least little spot of mud from my boot! The petty pangs of these nameless torments, which an irritable man finds so great, only strengthened my passion.

"The unfortunate must make sacrifices which they may not mention to women who lead refined and luxurious lives. Such women see things through a prism that gilds all men and their surroundings. Egoism leads them to take cheerful views, and fashion makes them cruel; they do not wish to reflect, lest they lose their happiness, and the absorbing na-

ture of their pleasures absolves their indifference to the misfortunes of others. A penny never means millions to them; millions, on the contrary, seem a mere trifle. Perhaps love must plead his cause by great sacrifices, but a veil must be lightly drawn across them, they must go down into silence. So when wealthy men pour out their devotion, their fortunes, and their lives, they gain somewhat by these commonly entertained opinions, an additional lustre hangs about their lovers' follies; their silence is eloquent; there is a grace about the drawn veil; but my terrible distress bound me over to suffer fearfully or ever I might speak of my love or of dying for her sake.

"Was it a sacrifice after all? Was I not richly rewarded by the joy I took in sacrificing everything to her? There was no commonest event of my daily life to which the countess had not given importance, had not overfilled with happiness. I had been hitherto careless of my clothes, now I respected my coat as if it had been a second self. I should not have hesitated between bodily harm and a tear in that garment. You must enter wholly into my circumstances to understand the stormy thoughts, the gathering frenzy, that shook me as I went, and which, perhaps, were increased by my walk. I gloated in an infernal fashion which I cannot describe over the absolute completeness of my wretchedness. I would have drawn from it an augury of my future, but there is no limit to the possibilities of misfortune. The door of my lodging-house stood ajar. A light streamed from the heart-shaped opening cut in the shutters. Pauline and her mother were sitting up for me and talking. I heard my name spoken, and listened.

"'Raphael is much nicer-looking than the student in number seven,' said Pauline; 'his fair hair is such a pretty color. Don't you think there is something in his voice, too, I don't know what it is, that gives you a sort of thrill? And, then, though he may be a little proud, he is very kind, and he has such fine manners; I am sure that all the ladies must be quite wild about him.'

"'You might be fond of him yourself, to hear you talk,' was Madame Gaudin's comment.

"'He is just as dear to me as a brother,' she laughed. 'I should be finely ungrateful if I felt no friendship for him. Didn't he teach me music and drawing and grammar, and everything I know in fact? You don't much notice how I get on, dear mother; but I shall know enough, in a while, to give lessons myself, and then we can keep a servant.'

"I stole away softly, made some noise outside, and went into their room to take the lamp that Pauline tried to light for me. The dear child had just poured soothing balm into my wounds. Her outspoken admiration had given me fresh courage. I so needed to believe in myself and to come by a just estimate of my advantages. This revival of hope in me perhaps colored my surroundings. Perhaps also I had never before really looked at the picture that so often met my eyes, of the two women in their room; it was a scene such as Flemish painters have reproduced so faithfully for us that I admired in its delightful reality. The mother, with the kind smile upon her lips, sat knitting stockings by the dying fire; Pauline was painting hand-screens, her brushes and paints, strewn over the tiny table, made bright spots of color for the eye to dwell on. When she had left her seat and stood lighting my lamp, one must have been under the yoke of a terrible passion indeed not to admire her faintly flushed transparent hands, the girlish charm of her attitude, the ideal grace of her head, as the lamplight fell full on her pale face. Night and silence added to the charms of this industrious vigil and peaceful interior. The light-heartedness that sustained such continuous toil could only spring from devout submission and the lofty feelings that it brings.

"There was an indescribable harmony between them and their possessions. The splendor of Fœdora's home did not satisfy; it called out all my worst instincts; something in this lowly poverty and unfeigned goodness revived me. It may have been that luxury abased me in my own eyes, while here my self-respect was restored to me, as I sought to ex-

tend the protection that a man is so eager to make felt, over these two women, who in the bare simplicity of the existence in their brown room seemed to live wholly in the feelings of their hearts. As I came up to Pauline, she looked at me in an almost motherly way; her hands shook a little as she held the lamp, so that the light fell on me, and cried—

"'Dieu! how pale you are! and you are wet through! My mother will try to wipe you dry. Monsieur Raphael,' she went on, after a little pause, 'you are so very fond of milk, and to-night we happen to have some cream. Here, will you not take some?'

"She pounced like a kitten on a china bowl full of milk. She did it so quickly, and put it before me so prettily, that I hesitated.

"'You are going to refuse me?' she said, and her tones changed.

"The pride in each felt for the other's pride. It was Pauline's poverty that seemed to humiliate her, and to reproach me with my want of consideration, and I melted at once, and accepted the cream that might have been meant for her morning's breakfast. The poor child tried not to show her joy, but her eyes sparkled.

"'I needed it badly,' I said as I sat down. (An anxious look passed over her face.) 'Do you remember that passage, Pauline, where Bossuet tells how God gave more abundant reward for a cup of cold water than for a victory?'

"'Yes,' she said, her heart beating like some wild bird's in a child's hands.

"'Well, as we shall part very soon, now,' I went on in an unsteady voice, 'you must let me show my gratitude to you and to your mother for all the care you have taken of me.'

"'Oh, don't let us cast accounts,' she said, laughing. But her laughter covered an agitation that gave me pain. I went on without appearing to hear her words—

"'My piano is one of Erard's best instruments; and you must take it. Pray accept it without hesitation; I really

could not take it with me on the journey I am about to make.'

"Perhaps the melancholy tones in which I spoke enlightened the two women, for they seemed to understand, and eyed me with curiosity and alarm. Here was the affection that I had looked for in the glacial regions of the great world, true affection, unostentatious but tender, and possibly lasting.

" 'Don't take it to heart so,' the mother said; 'stay on here. My husband is on his way toward us even now,' she went on. 'I looked into the Gospel of St. John this evening while Pauline hung our door key in a Bible from her fingers. The key turned; that means that Gaudin is in health and doing well. Pauline began again for you and for the young man in number seven—it turned for you, but not for him. We are all going to be rich. Gaudin will come back a millionnaire. I dreamed once that I saw him in a ship full of serpents; luckily the water was rough, and that means gold or precious stones from over-sea.'

"The silly, friendly words were like the crooning lullaby with which a mother soothes her sick child; they in a manner calmed me. There was a pleasant heartiness in the worthy woman's looks and tones, which, if it could not remove trouble, at any rate soothed and quieted it, and deadened the pain. Pauline, keener-sighted than her mother, studied me uneasily; her quick eyes seemed to read my life and my future. I thanked the mother and daughter by an inclination of the head, and hurried away; I was afraid I should break down.

"I found myself alone under my roof, and laid myself down in my misery. My unhappy imagination suggested numberless baseless projects, and prescribed impossible resolutions. When a man is struggling in the wreck of his fortunes, he is not quite without resources, but I was engulfed. Ah, my dear fellow, we are too ready to blame the wretched. Let us be less harsh on the results of the most powerful of all social solvents. Where poverty is absolute there exist no such things as shame or crime, virtue or

intelligence. I knew not what to do; I was as defenceless as a maiden on her knees before a beast of prey. A penniless man who has no ties to bind him is master of himself at any rate, but a luckless wretch who is in love no longer belongs to himself, and may not take his own life. Love makes us almost sacred in our own eyes; it is the life of another that we revere within us; then and so begins for us the cruelest trouble of all—the misery with a hope in it, a hope for which we must even bear our torments. I thought I would go to Rastignac on the morrow to confide Fœdora's strange resolution to him, and with that I slept.

"'Ah, ha!' cried Rastignac, as he saw me enter his lodging at nine o'clock in the morning. 'I know what brings you here. Fœdora has dismissed you. Some kind souls, who were jealous of your ascendency over the countess, gave out that you were going to be married. Heaven only knows what follies your rivals have equipped you with, and what slanders have been directed at you.'

"'That explains everything!' I exclaimed. I remembered all my presumptuous speeches, and gave the countess credit for no little magnanimity. It pleased me to think that I was a miscreant who had not been punished nearly enough, and I saw nothing in her indulgence but the long-suffering charity of love.

"'Not quite so fast,' urged the prudent Gascon; 'Fœdora has all the sagacity natural to a profoundly selfish woman; perhaps she may have taken your measure while you still coveted only her money and her splendor; in spite of all your care, she could have read you through and through. She can dissemble far too well to let any dissimulation pass undetected. I fear,' he went on, 'that I have brought you into a bad way. In spite of her cleverness and her tact, she seems to me a domineering sort of person, like every woman who can only feel pleasure through her brain. Happiness for her lies entirely in a comfortable life and in social pleasures; her sentiment is only assumed; she will make you miserable; you will be her head footman.'

"He spoke to the deaf. I broke in upon him, disclosing, with an affectation of light-heartedness, the state of my finances.

" 'Yesterday evening,' he rejoined, 'luck ran against me, and that carried off all my available cash. But for that trivial mishap, I would gladly have shared my purse with you. But let us go and breakfast at the restaurant; perhaps there is good counsel in oysters.'

"He dressed, and had his tilbury brought round. We went to the Café de Paris like a couple of millionnaires, armed with all the audacious impertinence of the speculator whose capital is imaginary. That devil of a Gascon quite disconcerted me by the coolness of his manners and his absolute self-possession. While we were taking coffee after an excellent and well-ordered repast, a young dandy entered, who did not escape Rastignac. He had been nodding here and there among the crowd to this or that young man, distinguished both by personal attractions and elegant attire, and now he said to me—'Here's your man,' as he beckoned to this gentleman with a wonderful cravat, who seemed to be looking for a table that suited his ideas.

" 'That rogue has been decorated for bringing out books that he doesn't understand a word of,' whispered Rastignac; 'he is a chemist, a historian, a novelist, and a political writer; he has gone halves, thirds, or quarters in the authorship of I don't know how many plays, and he is as ignorant as Dom Miguel's mule. He is not a man so much as a name, a label that the public is familiar with. So he would do well to avoid shops inscribed with the motto, '*Ici l'on peut ecrire soi-même.*' He is acute enough to deceive an entire congress of diplomatists. In a couple of words, he is a moral half-caste, not quite a fraud, nor entirely genuine. But, hush! he has succeeded already; nobody asks anything further, and every one calls him an illustrious man.'

" 'Well, my esteemed and excellent friend, and how may Your Intelligence be?' So Rastignac addressed the stranger as he sat down at a neighboring table.

"'Neither well nor ill; I am overwhelmed with work. I have all the necessary materials for some very curious historical memoirs in my hands, and I cannot find any one to whom I can ascribe them. It worries me, for I shall have to be quick about it. Memoirs are falling out of fashion.'

"'What are the memoirs—contemporaneous, ancient, or memoirs of the court, or what?'

"'They relate to the Necklace affair.'

"'Now, isn't that a coincidence?' said Rastignac, turning to me and laughing. He looked again to the literary speculation, and said, indicating me—

"'This is M. de Valentin, one of my friends, whom I must introduce to you as one of our future literary celebrities. He had formerly an aunt, a marquise, much in favor once at court, and for about two years he has been writing a Royalist history of the Revolution.'

"Then, bending over this singular man of business, he went on—

"'He is a man of talent, and a simpleton that will do your memoirs for you, in his aunt's name, for a hundred crowns a volume.'

"'It's a bargain,' said the other, adjusting his cravat. 'Waiter, my oysters.'

"'Yes, but you must give me twenty-five louis as commission, and you will pay him in advance for each volume,' said Rastignac.

"'No, no. He shall only have fifty crowns on account, and then I shall be sure of having my manuscript punctually.'

"Rastignac repeated this business conversation to me in low tones; and then, without giving me any voice in the matter, he replied—

"'We agree to your proposal. When can we call upon you to arrange the affair?'

"'Oh, well! Come and dine here to-morrow at seven o'clock.'

"We rose. Rastignac flung some money to the waiter,

put the bill in his pocket, and we went out. I was quite stupefied by the flippancy and ease with which he had sold my venerable aunt, la Marquise de Montbauron.

"'I would sooner take ship for the Brazils, and give the Indians lessons in algebra, though I don't know a word of it, than tarnish my family name.'

"Rastignac burst out laughing.

"'How dense you are! Take the fifty crowns in the first instance, and write the memoirs. When you have finished them, you will decline to publish them in your aunt's name, imbecile! Madame de Montbauron, with her hooped petticoat, her rank and beauty, rouge and slippers, and her death upon the scaffold, is worth a great deal more than six hundred francs. And then, if the trade will not give your aunt her due, some old adventurer, or some shady countess or other, will be found to put her name to the memoirs.'

"'Oh,' I groaned; 'why did I quit the blameless life in my garret? This world has aspects that are very vilely dishonorable.'

"'Yes,' said Rastignac, 'that is all very poetical, but this is a matter of business. What a child you are! Now, listen to me. As to your work, the public will decide upon it; and as for my literary middle-man, hasn't he devoted eight years of his life to obtaining a footing in the book-trade, and paid heavily for his experience? You divide the money and the labor of the book with him very unequally, but isn't yours the better part? Twenty-five louis means as much to you as a thousand francs does to him. Come, you can write historical memoirs, a work of art such as never was, since Diderot once wrote six sermons for a hundred crowns?'

"'After all,' I said, in agitation, 'I cannot choose but do it. So, my dear friend, my thanks are due to you. I shall be quite rich with twenty-five louis.'

"'Richer than you think,' he laughed. 'If I have my commission from Finot in this matter, it goes to you, can't you see? Now let us go to the Bois de Boulogne,' he said; 'we shall see your countess there, and I will show you the

pretty little widow that I am to marry—a charming woman, an Alsatian, rather plump. She reads Kant, Schiller, Jean Paul, and a host of lachrymose books. She has a mania for continually asking my opinion, and I have to look as if I entered into all this German sensibility, and to know a pack of ballads—drugs, all of them, that my doctor absolutely prohibits. As yet I have not been able to wean her from her literary enthusiasms; she sheds torrents of tears as she reads Goethe, and I have to weep a little myself to please her, for she has an income of fifty thousand livres, my dear boy, and the prettiest little hand and foot in the world. Oh, if she would only say *mon ange* and *brouiller* instead of *mon anche* and *prouiller*, she would be perfection!'

"We saw the countess, radiant amid the splendors of her equipage. The coquette bowed very graciously to us both, and the smile she gave me seemed to me to be divine and full of love. I was very happy; I fancied myself beloved; I had money, a wealth of love in my heart, and my troubles were over. I was light-hearted, blithe, and content. I found my friend's lady-love charming. Earth and air and heaven —all nature—seemed to reflect Fœdora's smile for me.

"As we returned through the Champs-Élysées, we paid a visit to Rastignac's hatter and tailor. Thanks to the 'Necklace,' my insignificant peace-footing was to end, and I made formidable preparations for a campaign. Henceforward I need not shrink from a contest with the spruce and fashionable young men who made Fœdora's circle. I went home, locked myself in, and stood by my dormer window, outwardly calm enough, but in reality I bade a last good-by to the roofs without. I began to live in the future, rehearsed my life drama, and discounted love and its happiness. Ah, how stormy life can grow to be within the four walls of a garret! The soul within us is like a fairy; she turns straw into diamonds for us; and for us, at a touch of her wand, enchanted palaces arise, as flowers in the meadows spring up toward the sun.

"Toward noon, next day, Pauline knocked gently at my

door, and brought me—who could guess it?—a note from Fœdora. The countess asked me to take her to the Luxembourg, and to go thence to see with her the Museum and Jardin des Plantes.

" 'The man is waiting for an answer,' said Pauline, after quietly waiting for a moment.

"I hastily scrawled my acknowledgments, and Pauline took the note. I changed my dress. When my toilet was ended, and I looked at myself with some complaisance, an icy shiver ran through me as I thought—

" 'Will Fœdora walk or drive? Will it rain or shine? —No matter, though,' I said to myself; 'whichever it is, can one ever reckon with feminine caprice? She will have no money about her, and will want to give a dozen francs to some little Savoyard because his rags are picturesque.'

"I had not a brass farthing, and should have no money till the evening came. How dearly a poet pays for the intellectual prowess that method and toil have brought him, at such crises of our youth! Innumerable painfully vivid thoughts pierced me like barbs. I looked out of my window; the weather was very unsettled. If things fell out badly, I might easily hire a cab for the day; but would not the fear lie on me every moment that I might not meet Finot in the evening? I felt too weak to endure such fears in the midst of my felicity. Though I felt sure that I should find nothing, I began a grand search through my room; I looked for imaginary coins in the recesses of my mattress; I hunted about everywhere—I even shook out my old boots. A nervous fever seized me; I looked with wild eyes at the furniture when I had ransacked it all. Will you understand, I wonder, the excitement that possessed me when, plunged deep in the listlessness of despair, I opened my writing-table drawer, and found a fair and splendid ten-franc piece that shone like a rising star, new and sparkling, and slyly hiding in a cranny between two boards? I did not try to account for its previous reserve and the cruelty of which it had been guilty in thus lying hidden;

I kissed it for a friend faithful in adversity, and hailed it with a cry that found an echo, and made me turn sharply, to find Pauline with a face grown white.

"'I thought,' she faltered, 'that you had hurt yourself! The man who brought the letter—' (she broke off as if something smothered her voice). 'But mother has paid him,' she added, and flitted away like a wayward, capricious child. Poor little one! I wanted her to share my happiness. I seemed to have all the happiness in the world within me just then; and I would fain have returned to the unhappy all that I felt as if I had stolen from them.

"The intuitive perception of adversity is sound for the most part; the countess had sent away her carriage. One of those freaks that pretty women can scarcely explain to themselves had determined her to go on foot, by way of the boulevards, to the Jardin des Plantes.

"'It will rain,' I told her, and it pleased her to contradict me.

"As it fell out, the weather was fine while we went through the Luxembourg; when we came out, some drops fell from a great cloud, whose progress I had watched uneasily, and we took a cab. At the Museum I was about to dismiss the vehicle, and Fœdora (what agonies!) asked me not to do so. But it was like a dream in broad daylight for me, to chat with her, to wander in the Jardin des Plantes, to stray down the shady alleys, to feel her hand upon my arm; the secret transports repressed in me were reduced, no doubt, to a fixed and foolish smile upon my lips; there was something unreal about it all. Yet in all her movements, however alluring, whether we stood or whether we walked, there was nothing either tender or lover-like. When I tried to share in a measure the action of movement prompted by her life, I became aware of a check, or of something strange in her that I cannot explain, of an inner activity concealed in her nature. There is no suavity about the movements of women who have no soul in them. Our wills were opposed, and we did not keep step together. Words are want-

ing to describe this outward dissonance between two beings; we are not accustomed to read a thought in a movement. We instinctively feel this phenomenon of our nature, but it cannot be expressed.

"I did not dissect my sensations during those violent seizures of passion," Raphael went on, after a moment of silence, as if he were replying to an objection raised by himself. "I did not analyze my pleasures nor count my heart-beats then, as a miser scrutinizes and weighs his gold pieces. No; experience sheds its melancholy light over the events of the past to-day, and memory brings these pictures back, as the sea-waves in fair weather cast up fragment after fragment of the débris of a wrecked vessel upon the strand.

"'It is in your power to render me a rather important service,' said the countess, looking at me in an embarrassed way. 'After confiding to you my aversion for lovers, I feel myself more at liberty to entreat your good offices in the name of friendship. Will there not be very much more merit in obliging me to-day?' she asked, laughing.

"I looked at her in anguish. Her manner was coaxing, but in no wise affectionate; she felt nothing for me; she seemed to be playing a part, and I thought her a consummate actress. Then all at once my hopes awoke once more, at a single look and word. Yet if reviving love expressed itself in my eyes, she bore its light without any change in the clearness of her own; they seemed, like a tiger's eyes, to have a sheet of metal behind them. I used to hate her in such moments.

"'The influence of the Duc de Navarreins would be very useful to me, with an all-powerful person in Russia,' she went on, persuasion in every modulation of her voice, 'whose intervention I need in order to have justice done me in a matter that concerns both my fortune and my position in the world, that is to say, the recognition of my marriage by the Emperor. Is not the Duc de Navarreins a cousin of yours? A letter from him would settle everything.'

"'I am yours,' I answered; 'command me.'

"'You are very nice,' she said, pressing my hand. 'Come and have dinner with me, and I will tell you everything, as if you were my confessor.'

"So this discreet, suspicious woman, who had never been heard to speak a word about her affairs to any one, was going to consult me.

"'Oh, how dear to me is this silence that you have imposed on me!' I cried; 'but I would rather have had some sharper ordeal still.' And she smiled upon the intoxication in my eyes; she did not reject my admiration in any way; surely she loved me!

"Fortunately, my purse held just enough to satisfy the cabman. The day spent in her house, alone with her, was delicious; it was the first time that I had seen her in this way. Hitherto we had always been kept apart by the presence of others, and by her formal politeness and reserved manners, even during her magnificent dinners; but now it was as if I lived beneath her own roof—I had her all to myself, so to speak. My wandering fancy broke down barriers, arranged the events of life to my liking, and steeped me in happiness and love. I seemed to myself her husband, I liked to watch her busied with little details; it was a pleasure to me even to see her take off her bonnet and shawl. She left me alone for a little, and came back, charming, with her hair newly arranged; and this dainty change of toilet had been made for me!

"During the dinner she lavished attention upon me, and put charm without end into those numberless trifles to all seeming that make up half of our existence nevertheless. As we sat together before a crackling fire, on silken cushions, surrounded by the most desirable creations of Oriental luxury; as I saw this woman whose famous beauty made every heart beat, so close to me; an unapproachable woman who was talking and bringing all her powers of coquetry to bear upon me; then my blissful pleasure rose almost to the point of suffering. To my vexation, I recollected the important

business to be concluded; I determined to go to keep the appointment made for me for this evening.

"'So soon?' she said, seeing me take my hat.

"She loved me, then! or I thought so at least, from the bland tones in which those two words were uttered. I would then have bartered a couple of years of life for every hour she chose to grant me, and so prolong my ecstasy. My happiness was increased by the extent of the money I sacrificed. It was midnight before she dismissed me. But on the morrow, for all that, my heroism cost me a good many remorseful pangs; I was afraid the affair of the Memoirs, now of such importance for me, might have fallen through, and rushed off to Rastignac. We found the nominal author of my future labors just getting up.

"Finot read over a brief agreement to me, in which nothing whatever was said about my aunt, and when it had been signed he paid me down fifty crowns, and the three of us breakfasted together. I had only thirty francs left over, when I had paid for my new hat, for sixty tickets at thirty sous each, and settled my debts; but for some days to come the difficulties of living were removed. If I had but listened to Rastignac, I might have had abundance by frankly adopting the 'English system.' He really wanted to establish my credit by setting me to raise loans, on the theory that borrowing is the basis of credit. To hear him talk, the future was the largest and most secure kind of capital in the world. My future luck was hypothecated for the benefit of my creditors, and he gave my custom to his tailor, an artist, and a young man's tailor, who was to leave me in peace until I married.

"The monastic life of study that I had led for three years past ended on this day. I frequented Fœdora's house very diligently, and tried to outshine the heroes or the swaggerers to be found in her circle. When I believed that I had left poverty forever behind me, I regained my freedom of mind, humiliated my rivals, and was looked upon as a very attractive, dazzling, and irresistible sort of man. But acute folk

used to say with regard to me, 'A fellow as clever as that will keep all his enthusiasms in his brain,' and charitably extolled my faculties at the expense of my feelings. 'Isn't he lucky, not to be in love!' they exclaimed. 'If he were, could he be so light-hearted and animated?' Yet in Fœdora's presence I was as dull as love could make me. When I was alone with her, I had not a word to say, or if I did speak, I renounced love; and I affected gayety but ill, like a courtier who has a bitter mortification to hide. I tried in every way to make myself indispensable in her life, and necessary to her vanity and to her comfort; I was a plaything at her pleasure, a slave always at her side. And when I had frittered away the day in this way, I went back to my work at night, securing merely two or three hours' sleep in the early morning.

"But I had not, like Rastignac, the 'English system' at my finger-ends, and I very soon saw myself without a penny. I fell at once into that precarious way of life which industriously hides cold and miserable depths beneath an elusive surface of luxury; I was a coxcomb without conquests, a penniless fop, a nameless gallant. The old sufferings were renewed, but less sharply; no doubt I was growing used to the painful crises. Very often my sole diet consisted of the scanty provision of cakes and tea that is offered in drawing-rooms, or one of the countess's great dinners must sustain me for two whole days. I used all my time, and exerted every effort and all my powers of observation, to penetrate the impenetrable character of Fœdora. Alternate hope and despair had swayed my opinions; for me she was sometimes the tenderest, sometimes the most unfeeling of women. But these transitions from joy to sadness became unendurable; I sought to end the horrible conflict within me by extinguishing love. By the light of warning gleams my soul sometimes recognized the gulfs that lay between us. The countess confirmed all my fears; I had never yet detected any tear in her eyes; an affecting scene in a play left her smiling and unmoved. All her instincts were selfish; she

could not divine another's joy or sorrow. She had made a fool of me, in fact!

"I had rejoiced over a sacrifice to make for her, and almost humiliated myself in seeking out my kinsman, the Duc de Navarreins, a selfish man who was ashamed of my poverty, and had injured me too deeply not to hate me. He received me with the polite coldness that makes every word and gesture seem an insult; he looked so ill at ease that I pitied him. I blushed for this pettiness amid grandeur, and penuriousness surrounded by luxury. He began to talk to me of his heavy losses in the three per cents, and then I told him the object of my visit. The change in his manners, hitherto glacial, which now gradually became affectionate, disgusted me.

"Well, he called upon the countess, and completely eclipsed me with her.

"On him Fœdora exercised spells and witcheries unheard of; she drew him into her power, and arranged her whole mysterious business with him; I was left out, I heard not a word of it; she had made a tool of me! She did not seem to be aware of my existence while my cousin was present; she received me less cordially perhaps than when I was first presented to her. One evening she chose to mortify me before the duke by a look, a gesture, that it is useless to try to express in words. I went away with tears in my eyes, planning terrible and outrageous schemes of vengeance without end.

"I often used to go with her to the theatre. Love utterly absorbed me as I sat beside her; as I looked at her I used to give myself up to the pleasure of listening to the music, putting all my soul into the double joy of love and of hearing every emotion of my heart translated into musical cadences. It was my passion that filled the air and the stage, that was triumphant everywhere, but with my mistress. Then I would take Fœdora's hand. I used to scan her features and her eyes, imploring of them some indication that one blended feeling possessed us both, seeking for the sudden

harmony awakened by the power of music, which makes our souls vibrate in unison; but her hand was passive, her eyes said nothing.

"When the fire that burned in me glowed too fiercely from the face I turned upon her, she met it with that studied smile of hers, the conventional expression that sits on the lips of every portrait in every exhibition. She was not listening to the music. The divine pages of Rossini, Cimarosa, or Zingarelli called up no emotion, gave no voice to any poetry in her life; her soul was a desert.

"Fœdora presented herself as a drama before a drama. Her lorgnette travelled restlessly over the boxes; she was restless too beneath the apparent calm; fashion tyrannized over her; her box, her bonnet, her carriage, her own personality absorbed her entirely. My merciless knowledge thoroughly tore away all my illusions. If good breeding consists in self-forgetfulness and consideration for others, in constantly showing gentleness in voice and bearing, in pleasing others, and in making them content in themselves, all traces of her plebeian origin were not yet obliterated in Fœdora, in spite of her cleverness. Her self-forgetfulness was a sham, her manners were not innate but painfully acquired, her politeness was rather subservient. And yet for those she singled out, her honeyed words expressed natural kindness, her pretentious exaggeration was exalted enthusiasm. I alone had scrutinized her grimacings, and stripped away the thin rind that sufficed to conceal her real nature from the world; her trickery no longer deceived me; I had sounded the depths of that feline nature. I blushed for her when some donkey or other flattered and complimented her. And yet I loved her through it all! I hoped that her snows would melt with the warmth of a poet's love. If I could only have made her heart capable of a woman's tenderness, if I could have made her feel all the greatness that lies in devotion, then I should have seen her perfected, she would have been an angel. I loved her as a man, a lover, and an artist; if it had been necessary not to love her so that I might win her,

some cool-headed coxcomb, some self-possessed calculator would perhaps have had the advantage over me. She was so vain and sophisticated that the language of vanity would appeal to her; she would have allowed herself to be taken in the toils of an intrigue; a hard, cold nature would have gained a complete ascendency over her. Keen grief had pierced me to my very soul, as she unconsciously revealed her absolute love of self. I seemed to see her as she one day would be, alone in the world, with no one to whom she could stretch her hand, with no friendly eyes for her own to meet and rest upon. I was bold enough to set this before her one evening; I painted in vivid colors her lonely, sad, deserted old age. Her comment on this prospect of so terrible a revenge of thwarted nature was horrible.

"'I shall always have money,' she said; 'and with money we can always inspire such sentiments as are necessary for our comfort in those about us.'

"I went away confounded by the arguments of luxury, by the reasoning of this woman, of the world in which she lived; and blamed myself for my infatuated idolatry. I myself had not loved Pauline because she was poor; and had not the wealthy Fœdora a right to repulse Raphael? Conscience is our unerring judge until we finally stifle it. A specious voice said within me, 'Fœdora is neither attracted to nor repulses any one; she has her liberty, but once upon a time she sold herself to the Russian count, her husband or her lover, for gold. But temptation is certain to enter into her life. Wait till that moment comes!' She lived remote from humanity, in a sphere apart, in a hell or a heaven of her own; she was neither frail nor virtuous. This feminine enigma in embroideries and cashmeres had brought into play every emotion of the human heart in me—pride, ambition, love, curiosity.

"There was a craze just then for praising a play at a little Boulevard theatre, prompted perhaps by a wish to appear original that besets us all, or due to some freak of fashion. The countess showed some signs of a wish to see the floured

face of the actor who had so delighted several people of taste, and I obtained the honor of taking her to a first representation of some wretched farce or other. A box scarcely cost five francs, but I had not a brass farthing. I was but half-way through the volume of Memoirs; I dared not beg for assistance of Finot, and Rastignac, my providence, was away. These constant perplexities were the bane of my life.

"We had once come out of the theatre when it was raining heavily; Fœdora had called a cab for me before I could escape from her show of concern; she would not admit any of my excuses—my liking for wet weather, and my wish to go to the gaming-table. She did not read my poverty in my embarrassed attitude, nor in my forced jests. My eyes would redden, but she did not understand a look. A young man's life is at the mercy of the strangest whims! At every revolution of the wheels during the journey, thoughts that burned stirred in my heart. I tried to pull up a plank from the bottom of the vehicle, hoping to slip through the hole into the street; but finding insuperable obstacles, I burst into a fit of laughter, and then sat stupefied in calm dejection, like a man in the pillory. When I reached my lodging, Pauline broke in through my first stammering words with—'If you haven't any money—?'

"Ah, the music of Rossini was as nothing compared with those words. But to return to the performance at the Funambules.

"I thought of pawning the circlet of gold round my mother's portrait in order to escort the countess. Although the pawnbroker loomed in my thoughts as one of the doors of a convict's prison, I would rather myself have carried my bed thither than have begged for alms. There is something so painful in the expression of a man who asks money of you! There are loans that mulct us of our self-respect, just as some rebuffs from a friend's lips sweep away our last illusion.

"Pauline was working; her mother had gone to bed. I flung a stealthy glance over the bed; the curtains were

drawn back a little; Madame Gaudin was in a deep sleep, I thought, when I saw her quiet, sallow profile outlined against the pillow.

"'You are in trouble?' Pauline said, dipping her brush into the coloring.

"'It is in your power to do me a great service, my dear child,' I answered.

"The gladness in her eyes frightened me.

"'Is it possible that she loves me?' I thought. 'Pauline,' I began. I went and sat near to her, so as to study her. My tones had been so searching that she read my thought; her eyes fell, and I scrutinized her face. It was so pure and frank that I fancied I could see as clearly into her heart as into my own.

"'Do you love me?' I asked.

"'A little—passionately—not a bit!' she cried.

"Then she did not love me. Her jesting tones, and a little gleeful movement that escaped her, expressed nothing beyond a girlish, blithe goodwill. I told her about my distress and the predicament in which I found myself, and asked her to help me.

"'You do not wish to go to the pawnbroker's yourself, M. Raphael,' she answered, 'and yet you would send me!'

"I blushed in confusion at the child's reasoning. She took my hand in hers as if she wanted to compensate for this home-truth by her light touch upon it.

"'Oh, I would willingly go,' she said, 'but it is not necessary. I found two five-franc pieces at the back of the piano, that had slipped without your knowledge between the frame and the keyboard, and I laid them on your table.'

"'You will soon be coming into some money, M. Raphael,' said the kind mother, showing her face between the curtains, 'and I can easily loan you a few crowns meanwhile.'

"'Oh, Pauline!' I cried, as I pressed her hand, 'how I wish that I were rich!'

"'Bah! why should you?' she said petulantly. Her

hand shook in mine with the throbbing of her pulse; she snatched it away, and looked at both of mine.

"'You will marry a rich wife,' she said, 'but she will give you a great deal of trouble. Ah, Dieu! she will be your death—I am sure of it.'"

"In her exclamation there was something like belief in her mother's absurd superstitions.

"'You are very credulous, Pauline!'

"'The woman whom you will love is going to kill you—there is no doubt of it,' she said, looking at me with alarm.

"She took up her brush again and dipped it in the color; her great agitation was evident; she looked at me no longer. I was ready to give credence just then to superstitious fancies; no man is utterly wretched so long as he is superstitious; a belief of that kind is often in reality a hope.

"I found that those two magnificent five-franc pieces were lying, in fact, upon my table when I reached my room. During the first confused thoughts of early slumber, I tried to audit my accounts so as to explain this unhoped-for windfall; but I lost myself in useless calculations, and slept. Just as I was leaving my room to engage a box the next morning, Pauline came to see me.

"'Perhaps your ten francs is not enough,' said the amiable, kind-hearted girl; 'my mother told me to offer you this money. Take it, please, take it!'

"She laid three crowns upon the table, and tried to escape, but I would not let her go. Admiration dried the tears that sprang to my eyes.

"'You are an angel, Pauline,' I said. 'It is not the loan that touches me so much as the delicacy with which it is offered. I used to wish for a rich wife, a fashionable woman of rank; and now, alas! I would rather possess millions, and find some girl, as poor as you are, with a generous nature like your own; and I would renounce a fatal passion which will kill me. Perhaps what you told me will come true.'

"'That is enough,' she said, and fled away; the fresh trills of her birdlike voice rang up the staircase.

"'She is very happy in not yet knowing love,' I said to myself, thinking of the torments I had endured for many months past.

"Pauline's fifteen francs were invaluable to me. Fœdora, thinking of the stifling odor of the crowded place where we were to spend several hours, was sorry that she had not brought a bouquet; I went in search of flowers for her, as I had laid already my life and my fate at her feet. With a pleasure in which compunction mingled, I gave her a bouquet. I learned from its price the extravagance of superficial gallantry in the world. But very soon she complained of the heavy scent of a Mexican jessamine. The interior of the theatre, the bare bench on which she was to sit, filled her with intolerable disgust; she upbraided me for bringing her there. Although she sat beside me, she wished to go, and she went. I had spent sleepless nights, and squandered two months of my life for her, and I could not please her. Never had that tormenting spirit been more unfeeling or more fascinating.

"I sat beside her in the cramped back seat of the vehicle; all the way I could feel her breath on me and the contact of her perfumed glove; I saw distinctly all her exceeding beauty; I inhaled a vague scent of orris-root; so wholly a woman she was, with no touch of womanhood. Just then a sudden gleam of light lighted up the depths of this mysterious life for me. I thought all at once of a book just published by a poet, a genuine conception of the artist, in the shape of the statue of Polycletus.

"I seemed to see that monstrous creation, at one time an officer, breaking in a spirited horse; at another, a girl, who gives herself up to her toilet and breaks her lovers' hearts; or again, a false lover driving a timid and gentle maid to despair. Unable to analyze Fœdora by any other process, I told her this fanciful story; but no hint of her resemblance to this poetry of the impossible crossed her—it simply diverted her; she was like a child over a story from the 'Arabian Nights.'

"'Fœdora must be shielded by some talisman,' I thought to myself as I went back, 'or she could not resist the love of a man of my age, the infectious fever of that splendid malady of the soul. Is Fœdora, like Lady Delacour, a prey to a cancer? Her life is certainly an unnatural one.'

"I shuddered at the thought. Then I decided on a plan, at once the wildest and the most rational that lover ever dreamed of. I would study this woman from a physical point of view, as I had already studied her intellectually, and to this end I made up my mind to spend a night in her room without her knowledge. This project preyed upon me as a thirst for revenge gnaws at the heart of a Corsican monk. This is how I carried it out. On the days when Fœdora received, her rooms were far too crowded for the hall-porter to keep the balance even between goers and comers; I could remain in the house, I felt sure, without causing a scandal in it, and I waited the countess's coming soirée with impatience. As I dressed I put a little English penknife into my waistcoat pocket, instead of a poniard. That literary implement, if found upon me, could awaken no suspicion, but I knew not whither my romantic resolution might lead, and I wished to be prepared.

"As soon as the rooms began to fill, I entered the bedroom and examined the arrangements. The inner and outer shutters were closed; this was a good beginning; and as the waiting-maid might come to draw back the curtains that hung over the windows, I pulled them together. I was running great risks in venturing to manœuvre beforehand in this way, but I had accepted the situation, and had deliberately reckoned with its dangers.

"About midnight I hid myself in the embrasure of the window. I tried to scramble on to a ledge of the wainscoting, hanging on by the fastening of the shutters with my back against the wall, in such a position that my feet could not be visible. When I had carefully considered my points of support, and the space between me and the curtains, I had become sufficiently acquainted with all the difficulties

of my position to stay in it without fear of detection if undisturbed by cramp, coughs, or sneezings. To avoid useless fatigue, I remained standing until the critical moment, when I must hang suspended like a spider in its web. The white watered silk and muslin of the curtains spread before me in great plaits like organ-pipes. With my penknife I cut loopholes in them, through which I could see.

"I heard vague murmurs from the salons, the laughter and the louder tones of the speakers. The smothered commotion and vague uproar lessened by slow degrees. One man and another came for his hat from the countess's chest of drawers, close to where I stood. I shivered, if the curtains were disturbed, at the thought of the mischances consequent on the confused and hasty investigations made by the men in a hurry to depart, who were rummaging everywhere. When I experienced no misfortunes of this kind, I augured well of my enterprise. An old wooer of Fœdora's came for the last hat; he thought himself quite alone, looked at the bed, and heaved a great sigh, accompanied by some inaudible exclamation, into which he threw sufficient energy. In the boudoir close by, the countess, finding only some five or six intimate acquaintances about her, proposed tea. The scandals for which existing society has reserved the little faculty of belief that it retains, mingled with epigrams and trenchant witticisms, and the clatter of cups and spoons. Rastignac drew roars of laughter by merciless sarcasms at the expense of my rivals.

" 'M. de Rastignac is a man with whom it is better not to quarrel,' said the countess, laughing.

" 'I am quite of that opinion,' was his candid reply. 'I have always been right about my aversions—and my friendships as well,' he added. 'Perhaps my enemies are quite as useful to me as my friends. I have made a particular study of modern phraseology, and of the natural craft that is used in all attack or defence. Official eloquence is one of our perfect social products.

" 'One of your friends is not clever, so you speak of his

integrity and his candor. Another's work is heavy; you introduce it as a piece of conscientious labor; and if the book is ill written, you extol the ideas it contains. Such a one is treacherous and fickle, slips through your fingers every moment; bah! he is attractive, bewitching, he is delightful! Suppose they are enemies, you fling every one, dead or alive, in their teeth. You reverse your phraseology for their benefit, and you are as keen in detecting their faults as you were before adroit in bringing out the virtues of your friends. This way of using the mental lorgnette is the secret of conversation nowadays, and the whole art of the complete courtier. If you neglect it, you might as well go out as an unarmed knight-banneret to fight against men in armor. And I make use of it, and even abuse it at times. So we are respected—I, my friends, and, moreover, my sword is quite as sharp as my tongue.'

"One of Fœdora's most fervid worshippers, whose presumption was notorious, and who even made it contribute to his success, took up the glove thrown down so scornfully by Rastignac. He began an unmeasured eulogy of me, my performances, and my character. Rastignac had overlooked this method of detraction. His sarcastic encomiums misled the countess, who sacrificed without mercy; she betrayed my secrets, and derided my pretensions and my hopes, to divert her friends.

" 'There is a future before him,' said Rastignac. 'Some day he may be in a position to take a cruel revenge; his talents are at least equal to his courage; and I should consider those who attack him very rash, for he has a good memory—'

" 'And writes Memoirs,' put in the countess, who seemed to object to the deep silence that prevailed.

" 'Memoirs of a sham countess, madame,' replied Rastignac. 'Another sort of courage is needed to write that sort of thing.'

" 'I give him credit for plenty of courage,' she answered; 'he is faithful to me.'

"I was greatly tempted to show myself suddenly among the railers, like the shade of Banquo in "Macbeth." I should have lost a mistress, but I had a friend! But love inspired me all at once with one of those treacherous and fallacious subtleties that it can use to soothe all our pangs.

"If Fœdora loved me, I thought she would be sure to disguise her feelings by some mocking jest. How often the heart protests against a lie on the lips!

"Well, very soon my audacious rival, left alone with the countess, rose to go.

" 'What! already?' asked she in a coaxing voice that set my heart beating. 'Will you not give me a few more minutes? Have you nothing more to say to me? will you never sacrifice any of your pleasures for me?'

"He went away.

" 'Ah!' she yawned; 'how very tiresome they all are!'

"She pulled a cord energetically till the sound of a bell rang through the place; then, humming a few notes of 'Pria che spunti,' the countess entered her room. No one had ever heard her sing; her muteness had called forth the wildest explanations. She had promised her first lover, so it was said, who had been held captive by her talent, and whose jealousy over her stretched beyond his grave, that she would never allow others to experience a happiness that he wished to be his and his alone.

"I exerted every power of my soul to catch the sounds. Higher and higher rose the notes; Fœdora's life seemed to dilate within her; her throat poured forth all its richest tones; something wellnigh divine entered into the melody. There was a bright purity and clearness of tone in the countess's voice, a thrilling harmony which reached the heart and stirred its pulses. Musicians are seldom unemotional; a woman who could sing like that must know how to love indeed. Her beautiful voice made one more puzzle in a woman mysterious enough before. I beheld her then, as plainly as I see you at this moment. She seemed to listen

to herself, to experience a secret rapture of her own; she felt, as it were, an ecstasy like that of love.

"She stood before the hearth during the execution of the principal theme of the *rondo;* and when she ceased her face changed. She looked tired; her features seemed to alter. She had laid the mask aside; her part as an actress was over. Yet the faded look that came over her beautiful face, a result either of this performance or of the evening's fatigues, had its charms, too. 'This is her real self,' I thought.

"She set her foot on a bronze bar of the fender as if to warm it, took off her gloves, and drew over her head the gold chain from which her bejewelled scent-bottle hung. It gave me a quite indescribable pleasure to watch the feline grace of every movement; the supple grace a cat displays as it adjusts its toilet in the sun. She looked at herself in the mirror and said aloud ill-humoredly—'I did not look well this evening; my complexion is going with alarming rapidity; perhaps I ought to keep earlier hours, and give up this life of dissipation.—Does Justine mean to trifle with me?' She rang again; her maid hurried in. Where she had been I cannot tell; she came in by a secret staircase. I was anxious to make a study of her. I had lodged accusations, in my romantic imaginings, against this invisible waiting-woman, a tall, well-made brunette.

" 'Did madame ring?'

" 'Yes, twice,' answered Fœdora; 'are you really growing deaf nowadays?'

" 'I was preparing madame's milk of almonds.'

"Justine knelt down before her, unlaced her sandals and drew them off, while her mistress lay carelessly back on her cushioned armchair beside the fire, yawned, and scratched her head. Every movement was perfectly natural; there was nothing whatever to indicate the secret sufferings or emotions with which I had credited her.

" 'George must be in love!' she remarked. 'I shall dismiss him. He has drawn the curtains again to-night! What does he mean by it?'

"All the blood in my veins rushed to my heart at this observation, but no more was said about curtains.

" 'Life is very empty,' the countess went on. 'Ah! be careful not to scratch me as you did yesterday. Just look here, I still have the marks of your nails about me,' and she held out a little silken knee. She thrust her bare feet into velvet slippers bound with swan's down, and unfastened her dress, while Justine prepared to comb her hair.

" 'You ought to marry, madame, and have children.'

" 'Children!' she cried; 'it wants no more than that to finish me at once; and a husband! What man is there to whom I could—? Was my hair well arranged to-night?'

" 'Not particularly.'

' "You are a fool!'

" 'That way of crimping your hair too much is the least becoming way possible for you. Large, smooth curls suit you a great deal better.'

" 'Really?'

" 'Yes, really, madame, that wavy style only looks nice in fair hair.'

" 'Marriage? never, never! Marriage is a commercial arrangement, for which I was never made.'

"What a disheartening scene for a lover! Here was a lonely woman, without friends or kin, without the religion of love, without faith in any affection. Yet however slightly she might feel the need to pour out her heart, a craving that every human being feels, it could only be satisfied by gossiping with her maid, by trivial and indifferent talk. . . . I grieved for her.

"Justine unlaced her. I watched her carefully when she was at last unveiled. Her maidenly form, in its rose-tinged whiteness, was visible through her shift in the taper light, as dazzling as some silver statue behind its gauze covering. No, there was no defect that need shrink from the stolen glances of love. Alas, a fair form will overcome the stoutest resolutions!

"The maid lighted the taper in the alabaster sconce that hung before the bed, while her mistress sat thoughtful and

silent before the fire. Justine went for a warming-pan, turned down the bed, and helped to lay her mistress in it; then, after some further time spent in punctiliously rendering various services that showed how seriously Fœdora respected herself, her maid left her. The countess turned to and fro several times, and sighed; she was ill at ease; faint, just perceptible sounds, like signs of impatience, escaped from her lips. She reached out a hand to the table, and took a flask from it, from which she shook four or five drops of some brown liquid into some milk before taking it; again there followed some painful sighs, and the exclamation, '*Mon Dieu!*'

"The cry, and the tone in which it was uttered, wrung my heart. By degrees she lay motionless. This frightened me; but very soon I heard a sleeper's heavy, regular breathing. I drew the rustling silk curtains apart, left my post, went to the foot of the bed, and gazed at her with feelings that I cannot define. She was so enchanting as she lay like a child, with her arm above her head; but the sweetness of the fair, quiet visage, surrounded by the lace, only irritated me. I had not been prepared for the torture to which I was compelled to submit.

"'*Mon Dieu!*' that scrap of a thought which I understood not, but must even take as my sole light, had suddenly modified my opinion of Fœdora. Trite or profoundly significant, frivolous or of deep import, the words might be construed as expressive of either pleasure or pain, of physical or of mental suffering. Was it a prayer or a malediction, a forecast or a memory, a fear or a regret? A whole life lay in that utterance, a life of wealth or of penury; perhaps it contained a crime!

"The mystery that lurked beneath this fair semblance of womanhood grew afresh; there were so many ways of explaining Fœdora that she became inexplicable. A sort of language seemed to flow from between her lips. I put thoughts and feelings into the accidents of her breathing, whether weak or regular, gentle or labored. I shared her dreams; I would fain have divined her secrets by reading

them through her slumber. I hesitated among contradictory opinions and decisions without number. I could not deny my heart to the woman I saw before me, with the calm, pure beauty in her face. I resolved to make one more effort. If I told her the story of my life, my love, my sacrifices, might I not awaken pity in her or draw a tear from her who never wept?

"As I set all my hopes on this last experiment, the sounds in the streets showed that day was at hand. For a moment's space I pictured Fœdora waking to find herself in my arms. I could have stolen softly to her side and slipped them about her in a close embrace. Resolved to resist the cruel tyranny of this thought, I hurried into the salon, heedless of any sounds I might make; but, luckily, I came upon a secret door leading to a little staircase. As I had expected, the key was in the lock; I slammed the door, went boldly out into the court, and gained the street in three bounds, without looking round to see whether I was observed.

"A dramatist was to read a comedy at the countess's house in two days' time; I went thither, intending to outstay the others, so as to make a rather singular request to her; I meant to ask her to keep the following evening for me alone, and to deny herself to other comers; but when I found myself alone with her, my courage failed. Every tick of the clock alarmed me. It wanted only a quarter of an hour of midnight.

"'If I do not speak,' I thought to myself, 'I must smash my head against the corner of the mantelpiece.'

"I gave myself three minutes' grace; the three minutes went by, and I did not smash my head upon the marble; my heart grew heavy, like a sponge with water.

"'You are exceedingly amusing,' said she.

"'Ah, madame, if you could but understand me!' I said.

"'What is the matter with you?' she asked. 'You are turning pale.'

"'I am hesitating to ask a favor of you.'

"Her gesture revived my courage. I asked her to make the appointment with me.

"'Willingly,' she answered; 'but why will you not speak to me now?'

"'To be candid with you, I ought to explain the full scope of your promise: I want to spend this evening by your side, as if we were brother and sister. Have no fear; I am aware of your antipathies; you must have divined me sufficiently to feel sure that I should wish you to do nothing that could be displeasing to you; presumption, moreover, would not thus approach you. You have been a friend to me, you have shown me kindness and great indulgence; know, therefore, that to-morrow I must bid you farewell. —Do not take back your word,' I exclaimed, seeing her about to speak, and I went away.

"At eight o'clock one evening toward the end of May, Fœdora and I were alone together in her gothic boudoir. I feared no longer; I was secure of happiness. My mistress should be mine, or I would seek a refuge in death. I had condemned my faint-hearted love, and a man who acknowledges his weakness is strong indeed.

"The countess, in her blue cashmere gown, was reclining on a sofa, with her feet on a cushion. She wore an Oriental turban such as painters assign to early Hebrews; its strangeness added an indescribable coquettish grace to her attractions. A transitory charm seemed to have laid its spell on her face; it might have furnished the argument that at every instant we become new and unparalleled beings, without any resemblance to the *us* of the future or of the past. I had never yet seen her so radiant.

"'Do you know that you have piqued my curiosity?' she said, laughing.

"'I will not disappoint it,' I said quietly, as I seated myself near to her and took the hand that she surrendered to me. 'You have a very beautiful voice!'

"'You have never heard me sing!' she exclaimed, starting involuntarily with surprise.

"'I will prove that it is quite otherwise, whenever it is necessary. Is your delightful singing still to remain a mystery? Have no fear, I do not wish to penetrate it.'

"We spent about an hour in familiar talk. While I adopted the attitude and manner of a man to whom Fœdora must refuse nothing, I showed her all a lover's deference. Acting in this way, I received a favor—I was allowed to kiss her hand. She daintily drew off the glove; and my whole soul was dissolved and poured forth in that kiss. I was steeped in the bliss of an illusion in which I tried to believe.

"Fœdora lent herself most unexpectedly to my caress and my flatteries. Do not accuse me of faint-heartedness; if I had gone a step beyond these fraternal compliments the claws would have been out of the sheath and into me. We remained perfectly silent for nearly ten minutes. I was admiring her, investing her with the charms she had not. She was mine just then, and mine only—this enchanting being was mine, as was permissible, in my imagination; my longing wrapped her round and held her close; in my soul I wedded her. The countess was subdued and fascinated by my magnetic influence. Ever since I have regretted that this subjugation was not absolute; but just then I yearned for her soul, her heart alone, and for nothing else. I longed for an ideal and perfect happiness, a fair illusion that cannot last for very long. At last I spoke, feeling that the last hours of my frenzy were at hand.

"'Hear me, madame. I love you, and you know it, I have said so a hundred times; you must have understood me. I would not take upon me the airs of a coxcomb, nor would I flatter you, nor urge myself upon you like a fool; I would not owe your love to such arts as these, so I have been misunderstood. What sufferings have I not endured for your sake! For these, however, you were not to blame; but in a few minutes you shall decide for yourself. There are two kinds of poverty, madame. One kind openly walks the street in rags, an unconscious imitator of Diogenes, on a

scanty diet, reducing life to its simplest terms; he is happier, maybe, than the rich; he has fewer cares at any rate, and accepts such portions of the world as stronger spirits refuse. Then there is poverty in splendor, a Spanish pauper, concealing the life of a beggar by his title, his bravery, and his pride; poverty that wears a white waistcoat and yellow kid gloves, a beggar with a carriage, whose whole career will be wrecked for lack of a half-penny. Poverty of the first kind belongs to the populace; the second kind is that of blacklegs, of kings, and of men of talent. I am neither a man of the people, nor a king, nor a swindler; possibly I have no talent either; I am an exception. With the name I bear I must die sooner than beg. Set your mind at rest, madame,' I said; 'to-day I have abundance, I possess sufficient of the clay for my needs'; for the hard look passed over her face which we wear whenever a well-dressed beggar takes us by surprise. 'Do you remember the day when you wished to go to the Gymnase without me, never believing that I should be there?' I went on.

"She nodded.

" 'I had laid out my last five-franc piece that I might see you there.—Do you recollect our walk in the Jardin des Plantes? The hire of your cab took everything I had.'

"I told her about my sacrifices, and described the life I led; heated not with wine, as I am to-day, but by the generous enthusiasm of my heart, my passion overflowed in burning words; I have forgotten how the feelings within me blazed forth; neither memory nor skill of mine could possibly reproduce it. It was no colorless chronicle of blighted affections; my love was strengthened by fair hopes; and such words came to me, by love's inspiration, that each had power to set forth a whole life—like echoes of the cries of a soul in torment. In such tones the last prayers ascend from dying men on the battlefield. I stopped, for she was weeping. *Grand Dieu!* I had reaped an actor's reward, the success of a counterfeit passion displayed at the cost of five francs paid at the theatre door. I had drawn tears from her.

"'If I had known—' she said.

"'Do not finish the sentence,' I broke in. 'Even now I love you well enough to murder you—'

"She reached for the bell-pull. I burst into a roar of laughter.

"'Do not call any one,' I said. 'I shall leave you to finish your life in peace. It would be a blundering kind of hatred that would murder you! You need not fear violence of any kind; I have spent a whole night at the foot of your bed without—'

"'Monsieur—' she said, blushing; but after that first impulse of modesty that even the most hardened women must surely own, she flung a scornful glance at me, and said—

"'You must have been very cold.'

"'Do you think that I set such value on your beauty, madame,' I answered, guessing the thoughts that moved her. 'Your beautiful face is for me a promise of a soul yet more beautiful. Madame, those to whom a woman is merely a woman can always purchase odalisques fit for the seraglio, and achieve their happiness at a small cost. But I aspired to something higher; I wanted the life of close communion of heart and heart with you that have no heart. I know that now. If you were to belong to another, I could kill him. And yet, no; for you would love him, and his death might hurt you perhaps. What agony this is!' I cried.

"'If it is any comfort to you,' she retorted cheerfully, 'I can assure you that I shall never belong to any one—'

"'So you offer an affront to God Himself,' I interrupted; 'and you will be punished for it. Some day you will lie upon your sofa suffering unheard-of ills, unable to endure the light or the slightest sound, condemned to live as it were in the tomb. Then, when you seek the causes of those lingering and avenging torments, you will remember the woes that you distributed so lavishly upon your way. You have sown curses, and hatred will be your reward. We are the real judges, the executioners of a justice that reigns here below, which overrules the justice of man and the laws of God.'

"'No doubt it is very culpable in me not to love you,' she said, laughing. 'Am I to blame? No. I do not love you; you are a man, that is sufficient. I am happy by myself; why should I give up my way of living, a selfish way, if you will, for the caprices of a master? Marriage is a sacrament by virtue of which each imparts nothing but vexations to the other. Children, moreover, worry me. Did I not faithfully warn you about my nature? Why are you not satisfied to have my friendship? I wish I could make you amends for all the troubles I have caused you, through not guessing the value of your poor five-franc pieces. I appreciate the extent of your sacrifices; but your devotion and delicate tact can be repaid by love alone, and I care so little for you that this scene has a disagreeable effect upon me.'

"'I am fully aware of my absurdity,' I said, unable to restrain my tears. 'Pardon me,' I went on, 'it was a delight to hear those cruel words you have just uttered, so well I love you. Oh, if I could testify my love with every drop of blood in me!'

"'Men always repeat these classic formulas to us, more or less effectively,' she answered, still smiling. But it appears very difficult to die at our feet, for I see corpses of that kind about everywhere. It is twelve o'clock. Allow me to go to bed.'

"'And in two hours' time you will cry to yourself, *Ah, mon Dieu!*'

"'Like the day before yesterday! Yes,' she said, 'I was thinking of my stockbroker; I had forgotten to tell him to convert my five per cent stock into the threes, and the three per cents had fallen during the day.'

"I looked at her, and my eyes glittered with anger. Sometimes a crime may be a whole romance; I understood that just then. She was so accustomed, no doubt, to the most impassioned declarations of this kind, that my words and my tears were forgotten already. 'Would you marry a peer of France?' I demanded abruptly.

"'If he were a duke, I might.'

"I seized my hat and made her a bow.

"'Permit me to accompany you to the door,' she said, cutting irony in her tones, in the poise of her head, and in her gesture.

"'Madame—'

"'Monsieur?'

"'I shall never see you again.'

"'I hope not,' and she insolently inclined her head.

"'You wish to be a duchess?' I cried, excited by a sort of madness that her insolence roused in me. 'You are wild for honors and titles? Well, only let me love you; bid my pen write and my voice speak for you alone; be the inmost soul of my life, my guiding star! Then, only accept me for your husband as a minister, a peer of France, a duke. I will make of myself whatever you would have me be!'

"'You made good use of the time you spent with the advocate,' she said, smiling. 'There is a fervency about your pleadings.'

"'The present is yours,' I cried, 'but the future is mine! I only lose a woman; you are losing a name and a family. Time is big with my revenge; time will spoil your beauty, and yours will be a solitary death; and glory waits for me!'

"'Thanks for your peroration!' she said, repressing a yawn; the wish that she might never see me again was expressed in her whole bearing.

"That remark silenced me. I flung at her a glance full of hatred, and hurried away.

"Fœdora must be forgotten; I must cure myself of my infatuation, and betake myself once more to my lonely studies, or die. So I set myself tremendous tasks; I determined to complete my labors. For fifteen days I never left my garret, spending whole nights in pallid thought. I worked with difficulty, and by fits and starts, despite my courage and the stimulation of despair. The muse had fled. I could not exorcise the brilliant mocking image of Fœdora. Something morbid brooded over every thought, a vague

longing as dreadful as remorse. I imitated the anchorites of the Thebaid. If I did not pray as they did, I lived a life in the desert like theirs, hewing out my ideas as they were wont to hew their rocks. I could at need have girdled my waist with spikes, that physical suffering might quell mental anguish.

"One evening Pauline found her way into my room.

" 'You are killing yourself,' she said, imploringly; 'you should go out and see your friends—'

" 'Pauline, you were a true prophet; Fœdora is killing me, I want to die. My life is intolerable.'

" 'Is there only one woman in the world?' she asked, smiling. 'Why make yourself so miserable in so short a life?'

"I looked at Pauline in bewilderment. She left me before I noticed her departure; the sound of her words had reached me, but not their sense. Very soon I had to take my Memoirs in manuscript to my literary contractor. I was so absorbed by my passion, that I could not remember how I had managed to live without money; I only knew that the four hundred and fifty francs due to me would pay my debts. So I went to receive my salary, and met Rastignac, who thought me changed and thinner.

" 'What hospital have you been discharged from?' he asked.

" 'The woman is killing me,' I answered; 'I can neither despise her nor forget her.'

" 'You had much better kill her, then perhaps you would think no more of her,' he said, laughing.

" 'I have often thought of it,' I replied; 'but though sometimes the thought of a crime revives my spirits, of violence and murder, either or both, I am really incapable of carrying out the design. The countess is an admirable monster who would crave for pardon, and not every man is an Othello.'

" 'She is like every woman who is beyond our reach,' Rastignac interrupted.

"'I am mad,' I cried; 'I can feel the madness raging at times in my brain. My ideas are like shadows; they flit before me, and I cannot grasp them. Death would be preferable to this life, and I have carefully considered the best way of putting an end to the struggle. I am not thinking of the living Fœdora in the Faubourg Saint Honoré, but of my Fœdora here,' and I tapped my forehead. 'What do you say to opium?'

"'Pshaw! horrid agonies,' said Rastignac.

"'Or charcoal fumes?'

"'A low dodge.'

"'Or the Seine?'

"'The drag-nets, and the Morgue too, are filthy.'

"'A pistol-shot?'

"'And if you miscalculate, you disfigure yourself for life. Listen to me,' he went on; 'like all young men, I have pondered over suicide. Which of us hasn't killed himself two or three times before he is thirty? I find there is no better course than to use existence as a means of pleasure. Go in for thorough dissipation, and your passion or you will perish in it. Intemperance, my dear fellow, commands all forms of death. Does she not wield the thunderbolt of apoplexy? Apoplexy is a pistol-shot that does not miscalculate. Orgies are lavish in all physical pleasures; is not that the small change for opium? And the riot that makes us drink to excess bears a challenge to mortal combat with wine. That butt of Malmsey of the Duke of Clarence's must have had a pleasanter flavor than Seine mud. When we sink gloriously under the table, is not that a periodical death by drowning on a small scale? If we are picked up by the police and stretched out on those chilly benches of theirs at the police-station, do we not enjoy all the pleasures of the Morgue. For though we are not blue and green, muddy and swollen corpses, on the other hand we have the consciousness of the climax.

"'Ah,' he went on, 'this protracted suicide has nothing in common with a bankrupt grocer's demise. Tradespeople

have brought the river into disrepute; they fling themselves in to soften their creditors' hearts. In your place I should endeavor to die gracefully; and if you wish to invent a novel way of doing it, by struggling with life after this manner, I will be your second. I am disappointed and sick of everything. The Alsacienne, whom it was proposed that I should marry, had six toes on her left foot; I cannot possibly live with a woman who has six toes! It would get about to a certainty, and then I should be ridiculous. Her income was only eighteen thousand francs; her fortune diminished in quantity as her toes increased. The devil take it; if we begin an outrageous sort of life, we may come on some bit of luck, perhaps!'

"Rastignac's eloquence carried me away. The attractions of the plan shone too temptingly, hopes were kindled, the poetical aspects of the matter appealed to a poet.

" 'How about money?' I said.

" 'Haven't you four hundred and fifty francs?'

" 'Yes, but debts to my landlady and the tailor—'

" 'You would pay your tailor? You will never be anything whatever, not so much as a minister.'

" 'But what can one do with twenty louis?'

" 'Go to the gaming-table.'

"I shuddered.

" 'You are going to launch out into what I call systematic dissipation,' said he, noticing my scruples, 'and yet you are afraid of a green table-cloth.'

" 'Listen to me,' I answered. 'I promised my father never to set foot in a gaming-house. Not only is that a sacred promise, but I still feel an unconquerable disgust whenever I pass a gambling-hell; take the money and go without me. While our fortune is at stake, I will set my own affairs straight, and then I will go to your lodgings and wait for you.'

"That was the way I went to perdition. A young man has only to come across a woman who will not love him, or a woman who loves him too well, and his whole life be-

comes a chaos. Prosperity swallows up our energy just as adversity obscures our virtues. Back once more in my Hôtel de Saint-Quentin, I gazed about me a long while in the garret where I had led my scholar's temperate life, a life which would perhaps have been a long and honorable one, and that I ought not to have quitted for the fevered existence which had urged me to the brink of a precipice. Pauline surprised me in this dejected attitude.

"'Why, what is the matter with you?' she asked.

"I rose and quietly counted out the money owing to her mother, and added to it sufficient to pay for six months' rent in advance. She watched me in some alarm.

"'I am going to leave you, dear Pauline.'

"'I knew it!' she exclaimed.

"'Listen, my child. I have not given up the idea of coming back. Keep my room for me for six months. If I do not return by the fifteenth of November, you will come into possession of my things. This sealed packet of manuscript is the fair copy of my great work on "The Will,"' I went on, pointing to a package. 'Will you deposit it in the King's Library? And you may do as you wish with everything that is left here.'

"Her look weighed heavily on my heart; Pauline was an embodiment of conscience there before me.

"'I shall have no more lessons,' she said, pointing to the piano.

"I did not answer that.

"'Will you write to me?'

"'Good-by, Pauline.'

"I gently drew her toward me, and set a kiss on that innocent fair brow of hers, like snow that has not yet touched the earth—a father's or a brother's kiss. She fled. I would not see Madame Gaudin, hung my key in its wonted place, and departed. I was almost at the end of the Rue de Cluny when I heard a woman's light footstep behind me.

"'I have embroidered this purse for you,' Pauline said; 'will you refuse even that?'

"By the light of the street lamp I thought I saw tears in Pauline's eyes, and I groaned. Moved perhaps by a common impulse, we parted in haste like people who fear the contagion of the plague.

"As I waited with dignified calmness for Rastignac's return, his room seemed a grotesque interpretation of the sort of life I was about to enter upon. The clock on the chimney-piece was surmounted by a Venus resting on her tortoise; a half-smoked cigar lay in her arms. Costly furniture of various kinds—love-tokens, very likely—was scattered about. Old shoes lay on a luxurious sofa. The comfortable armchair into which I had thrown myself bore as many scars as a veteran; the arms were gashed, the back was overlaid with a thick, stale deposit of pomade and hair-oil from the heads of all his visitors. Splendor and squalor were oddly mingled, on the walls, the bed, and everywhere else. You might have thought of a Neapolitan palace and the groups of *lazzaroni* about it. It was the room of a gambler or a *mauvais sujet*, where the luxury exists merely for one individual, who leads the life of the senses and does not trouble himself over inconsistencies.

"There was a certain imaginative element about the picture it presented. Life was suddenly revealed there in its rags and spangles as the incomplete thing it really is, of course, but so vividly and picturesquely; it was like a den where a brigand has heaped up all the plunder in which he delights. Some pages were missing from a copy of Byron's poems: they had gone to light a fire of a few sticks for this young person, who played for stakes of a thousand francs, and had not a fagot; who kept a tilbury, and had not a whole shirt to his back. Any day a countess or an actress or a run of luck at écarté might set him up with an outfit worthy of a king. A candle had been stuck into the green bronze sheath of a vesta-holder; a woman's portrait lay yonder, torn out of its carved gold setting. How was it possible that a young man, whose nature craved excitement, could

renounce a life so attractive by reason of its contradictions; a life that afforded all the delights of war in the midst of peace? I was growing drowsy when Rastignac kicked the door open and shouted—'Victory! Now we can take our time about dying.'

"He held out his hat filled with gold to me, and put it down on the table; then we pranced round it like a pair of cannibals about to eat a victim; we stamped, and danced, and yelled, and sang; we gave each other blows fit to kill an elephant, at sight of all the pleasures of the world contained in that hat.

" 'Twenty-seven thousand francs,' said Rastignac, adding a few banknotes to the pile of gold. 'That would be enough for other folk to live upon; will it be sufficient for us to die on? Yes! we will breathe our last in a bath of gold—hurrah!' and we capered afresh.

"We divided the windfall. We began with double-napoleons, and came down to the smaller coins, one by one. 'This for you, this for me,' we kept on saying, distilling our joy drop by drop.

" 'We won't go to sleep,' cried Rastignac. 'Joseph! some punch!'

"He threw gold to his faithful attendant.

" 'There is your share,' he said; 'go and bury yourself if you can.'

"Next day I went to Lesage and chose my furniture, took the rooms that you know in the Rue Taitbout, and left the decoration to one of the best upholsterers. I bought horses. I plunged into a vortex of pleasures, at once hollow and real. I went in for play, gaining and losing enormous sums, but only at friends' houses and in ballrooms; never in gaming-houses, for which I still retained the holy horror of my early days. Without meaning it, I made some friends, either through quarrels or owing to the easy confidence established among those who are going to the bad together; nothing, possibly, makes us cling to one another so tightly as our evil propensities.

"I made several ventures in literature, which were flatteringly received. Great men who followed the profession of letters, having nothing to fear from me, belauded me, not so much on account of my merits as to cast a slur on those of their rivals.

"I became a 'free-liver,' to make use of the picturesque expression appropriated by the language of excess. I made it a point of honor not to be long about dying, and that my zeal and prowess should eclipse those displayed by all others in the jolliest company. I was always spruce and carefully dressed. I had some reputation for cleverness. There was no sign about me of that fearful way of living which makes a man into a mere digesting apparatus, a funnel, a pampered beast.

"Very soon Debauch rose before me in all the majesty of its horror, and I grasped all that it meant. Those prudent, steady-going characters who are laying down wine in bottles for their heirs, can barely conceive, it is true, of so wide a theory of life, nor appreciate its normal condition; but when will you instil poetry into the provincial intellect? Opium and tea, with all their delights, are merely drugs to folk of that calibre.

"Is not the imperfect sybarite to be met with even in Paris itself, that intellectual metropolis? Unfit to endure the fatigues of pleasure, this sort of person, after a drinking bout, is very much like those worthy bourgeois who fall foul of music after hearing a new opera by Rossini. Does he not renounce these courses in the same frame of mind that leads an abstemious man to forswear Ruffec patés, because the first one, forsooth, gave him the indigestion?

"Debauch is as surely an art as poetry, and is not for craven spirits. To penetrate its mysteries and appreciate its charms, conscientious application is required; and as with every path of knowledge, the way is thorny and forbidding at the outset. The great pleasures of humanity are hedged about with formidable obstacles; not its single enjoyments, but enjoyment as a system, a system which

establishes seldom experienced sensations and makes them habitual, which concentrates and multiplies them for us, creating a dramatic life within our life, and imperatively demanding a prompt and enormous expenditure of vitality. War, Power, Art, like Debauch, are all forms of demoralization, equally remote from the faculties of humanity, equally profound, and all are alike difficult of access. But when man has once stormed the heights of these grand mysteries, does he not walk in another world? Are not generals, ministers, and artists carried, more or less, toward destruction by the need of violent distractions in an existence so remote from ordinary life as theirs?

"War, after all, is the Excess of bloodshed, as the Excess of self-interest produces Politics. Excesses of every sort are brothers. These social enormities possess the attraction of the abyss; they draw us toward themselves as St. Helena beckoned Napoleon; we are fascinated, our heads swim, we wish to sound their depths, though we cannot account for the wish. Perhaps the thought of Infinity dwells in these precipices, perhaps they contain some colossal flattery for the soul of man; for is he not, then, wholly absorbed in himself?

"The wearied artist needs a complete contrast to his paradise of imaginings and of studious hours; he either craves, like God, the seventh day of rest, or, with Satan, the pleasures of hell; so that his senses may have free play in opposition to the employment of his faculties. Byron could never have taken for his relaxation to the independent gentleman's delights of boston and gossip, for he was a poet, and so must needs pit Greece against Mahmoud.

"In war, is not man an angel of extirpation, a sort of executioner on a gigantic scale? Must not the spell be strong indeed that makes us undergo such horrid sufferings so hostile to our weak frames, sufferings that encircle every strong passion with a hedge of thorns? The tobacco smoker is seized with convulsions, and goes through a kind of agony consequent upon his excesses; but has he not borne a part

in delightful festivals in realms unknown? Has Europe ever ceased from wars? She has never given herself time to wipe the stains from her feet that are steeped in blood to the ankle. Mankind at large is carried away by fits of intoxication, as nature has its accessions of love.

"For men in private life, for a vegetating Mirabeau dreaming of storms in a time of calm, Excess comprises all things; it perpetually embraces the whole sum of life; it is something better still—it is a duel with an antagonist of unknown power, a monster, terrible at first sight, that must be seized by the horns, a labor that cannot be imagined.

"Suppose that nature has endowed you with a feeble stomach or one of limited capacity; you acquire a mastery over it and improve it; you learn to carry your liquor; you grow accustomed to being drunk; you pass whole nights without sleep; at last you acquire the constitution of a colonel of cuirassiers; and in this way you create yourself afresh, as if to fly in the face of Providence.

"A man transformed after this sort is like a neophyte who has at last become a veteran, has accustomed his mind to shot and shell and his legs to lengthy marches. When the monster's hold on him is still uncertain, and it is not yet known which will have the better of it, they roll over and over, alternately victor and vanquished, in a world where everything is wonderful, where every ache of the soul is laid to sleep, where only the shadows of ideas are revived.

"This furious struggle has already become a necessity for us. The prodigal has struck a bargain for all the enjoyments with which life teems abundantly, at the price of his own death, like the mythical persons in legends who sold themselves to the devil for the power of doing evil. For them, instead of flowing quietly on in its monotonous course in the depths of some counting-house or study, life is poured out in a boiling torrent.

"Excess is, in short, for the body what the mystic's ecstasy is for the soul. Intoxication steeps you in fantastic

imaginings every whit as strange as those of ecstatics. You know hours as full of rapture as a young girl's dreams; you travel without fatigue; you chat pleasantly with your friends; words come to you with a whole life in each, and fresh pleasures without regrets; poems are set forth for you in a few brief phrases. The coarse animal satisfaction, in which science has tried to find a soul, is followed by the enchanted drowsiness that men sigh for under the burden of consciousness. Is it not because they all feel the need of absolute repose? Because Excess is a sort of toll that genius pays to pain?

"Look at all great men; nature made them pleasure-loving or base, every one. Some mocking or jealous power corrupted them in either soul or body, so as to make all their powers futile, and their efforts of no avail.

"All men and all things appear before you in the guise you choose, in those hours when wine has sway. You are lord of all creation; you transform it at your pleasure. And throughout this unceasing delirium, Play may pour, at your will, its molten lead into your veins.

"Some day you will fall into the monster's power. Then you will have, as I had, a frenzied awakening, with impotence sitting by your pillow. Are you an old soldier? Phthisis attacks you. A diplomatist? An aneurism hangs death in your heart by a thread. It will perhaps be consumption that will cry to me, 'Let us be going!' as to Rafael of Urbino, in old time, killed by an excess of love.

"In this way I have existed. I was launched into the world too early or too late. My energy would have been dangerous there, no doubt, if I had not squandred it in such ways as these. Was not the world rid of an Alexander, by the cup of Hercules, at the close of a drinking bout?

"There are some, the sport of Destiny, who must either have heaven or hell, the hospice of St. Bernard or riotous excess. Only just now I lacked the heart to moralize about those two," and he pointed to Euphrasia and Aquilina. "They are types of my own personal history, images of my

life! I could scarcely reproach them; they stood before me like judges.

"In the midst of this drama that I was enacting, and while my distracting disorder was at its height, two crises supervened; each brought me keen and abundant pangs. The first came a few days after I had flung myself, like Sardanapalus, on my pyre. I met Fœdora under the peristyle of the Bouffons. We both were waiting for our carriages.

"'Ah! so you are living yet?'

"That was the meaning of her smile, and probably of the spiteful words she murmured in the ear of her *cicisbeo*, telling him my history no doubt, rating mine as a common love affair. She was deceived, yet she was applauding her perspicacity. Oh, that I should be dying for her, must still adore her, always see her through my potations, see her still when I was overcome with wine, or in the arms of courtesans; and know that I was a target for her scornful jests! Oh, that I should be unable to tear the love of her out of my breast and to fling it at her feet!

"Well, I quickly exhausted my funds, but owing to those three years of discipline I enjoyed the most robust health, and on the day that I found myself without a penny I felt remarkably well. In order to carry on the process of dying, I signed bills at short dates, and the day came when they must be met. Painful excitements! but how they quicken the pulses of youth! I was not prematurely aged; I was young yet, and full of vigor and life.

"At my first debt all my virtues came to life; slowly and despairingly they seemed to pace toward me; but I could compound with them—they were like aged aunts that begin with a scolding and end by bestowing tears and money upon you.

"Imagination was less yielding; I saw my name bandied about through every city in Europe. 'One's name is one's self,' says Eusèbe Salverte. After these excursions I returned to the room I had never quitted, like a doppel-ganger in a German tale, and came to myself with a start.

"I used to see with indifference a banker's messenger going on his errands through the streets of Paris, like a commercial Nemesis, wearing his master's livery—a gray coat and a silver badge; but now I hated the species in advance. One of them came one morning to ask me to meet some eleven bills that I had scrawled my name upon. My signature was worth three thousand francs! Taking me altogether, I myself was not worth that amount. Sheriff's deputies rose up before me, turning their callous faces upon my despair, as the hangman regards the criminal to whom he says, 'It has just struck half-past three.' I was in the power of their clerks; they could scribble my name, drag it through the mire, and jeer at it. I was a defaulter. Has a debtor any right to himself? Could no other men call me to account for my way of living? Why had I eaten puddings *à la chipolata?* Why had I iced my wine? Why had I slept, or walked, or thought, or amused myself when I had not paid them?

"At any moment, in the middle of a poem, during some train of thought, or while I was gayly breakfasting in the pleasant company of my friends, I might look to see a gentleman enter in a coat of chestnut-brown, with a shabby hat in his hand. This gentleman's appearance would signify my debt, the bill I had drawn; the spectre would compel me to leave the table to speak to him, blight my spirits, despoil me of my cheerfulness, of my mistress, of all I possessed, down to my very bedstead.

"Remorse itself is more easily endured. Remorse does not drive us into the street nor into the prison of Sainte-Pélagie; it does not force us into the detestable sink of vice. Remorse only brings us to the scaffold, where the executioner invests us with a certain dignity; as we pay the extreme penalty, everybody believes in our innocence; but people will not credit a penniless prodigal with a single virtue.

"My debts had other incarnations. There is the kind that goes about on two feet, in a green cloth coat, and blue spectacles, carrying umbrellas of various hues; you come

face to face with him at the corner of some street, in the midst of your mirth. These have the detestable prerogative of saying, 'M. de Valentin owes me something, and does not pay. I have a hold on him. He had better not show me any offensive airs!' You must bow to your creditors, and moreover bow politely. 'When are you going to pay me?' say they. And you must lie, and beg money of another man, and cringe to a fool seated on his strong-box, and receive sour looks in return from these horse-leeches; a blow would be less hateful; you must put up with their crass ignorance and calculating morality. A debt is a feat of the imaginative that they cannot appreciate. A borrower is often carried away and overmastered by generous impulses; nothing great, nothing magnanimous can move or dominate those who live for money, and recognize nothing but money. I myself held money in abhorrence.

"Or a bill may undergo a final transformation into some meritorious old man with a family dependent upon him. My creditor might be a living picture for Greuze, a paralytic with his children round him, a soldier's widow, holding out beseeching hands to me. Terrible creditors are these with whom we are forced to sympathize, and when their claims are satisfied we owe them a further debt of assistance.

"The night before the bills fell due, I lay down with the false calm of those who sleep before their approaching execution, or with a duel in prospect, rocked as they are by delusive hopes. But when I woke, when I was cool and collected, when I found myself imprisoned in a banker's portfolio, and floundering in statements covered with red ink—then my debts sprang up everywhere, like grasshoppers, before my eyes. There were my debts, my clock, my armchairs; my debts were inlaid in the very furniture which I liked best to use. These gentle inanimate slaves were to fall a prey to the harpies of the Chatelet, were to be carried off by the broker's men, and brutally thrown on the market. Ah, my property was a part of myself!

"The sound of the door-bell rang through my heart;

while it seemed to strike at me, where kings should be struck at—in the head. Mine was a martyrdom, without heaven for its reward. For a magnanimous nature, debt is a hell, and a hell, moreover, with sheriff's officers and brokers in it. An undischarged debt is something mean and sordid; it is a beginning of knavery; it is something worse, it is a lie; it prepares the way for crime, and brings together the planks for the scaffold. My bills were protested. Three days afterward I met them, and this is how it happened.

"A speculator came, offering to buy the island in the Loire belonging to me, where my mother lay buried. I closed with him. When I went to his solicitor to sign the deeds, I felt a cavern-like chill in the dark office that made me shudder; it was the same cold dampness that had laid hold upon me at the brink of my father's grave. I looked upon this as an evil omen. I seemed to see the shade of my mother, and to hear her voice. What power was it that made my own name ring vaguely in my ears, in spite of the clamor of bells?

"The money paid down for my island, when all my debts were discharged, left me in possession of two thousand francs. I could now have returned to a scholar's tranquil life, it is true; I could have gone back to my garret after having gained an experience of life, with my head filled with the results of extensive observation, and with a certain sort of reputation attaching to me. But Fœdora's hold upon her victim was not relaxed. We often met. I compelled her admirers to sound my name in her ears, by dint of astonishing them with my cleverness and success, with my horses and equipages. It all found her impassive and uninterested; so did an ugly phrase of Rastignac's, 'He is killing himself for you.'

"I charged the world at large with my revenge, but I was not happy. While I was fathoming the miry depths of life, I only recognized the more keenly at all times the happiness of reciprocal affection; it was a shadow that I followed through all that befell me in my extravagance, and in my

wildest moments. It was my misfortune to be deceived in my fairest beliefs, to be punished by ingratitude for benefiting others, and to receive uncounted pleasures as the reward of my errors—a sinister doctrine, but a true one for the prodigal!

"The contagious leprosy of Fœdora's vanity had taken hold of me at last. I probed my soul, and found it cankered and rotten. I bore the marks of the devil's claw upon my forehead. It was impossible to me thenceforward to do without the incessant agitation of a life fraught with danger at every moment, or to dispense with the execrable refinements of luxury. If I had possessed millions, I should still have gambled, revelled, and racketed about. I wished never to be alone with myself, and I must have false friends and courtesans, wine and good cheer to distract me. The ties that attach a man to family life had been permanently broken for me. I had become a galley-slave of pleasure, and must accomplish my destiny of suicide. During the last days of my prosperity, I spent every night in the most incredible excesses; but every morning death cast me back upon life again. I would have taken a conflagration with as little concern as any man with a life annuity. However, I at last found myself alone with a twenty-franc piece; I bethought me then of Rastignac's luck—

"Eh, eh!—" Raphael exclaimed, interrupting himself, as he remembered the talisman and drew it from his pocket. Perhaps he was wearied by the long day's strain, and had no more strength left wherewith to pilot his head through the seas of wine and punch; or perhaps, exasperated by this symbol of his own existence, the torrent of his own eloquence gradually overwhelmed him. Raphael became excited and elated and like one completely deprived of reason.

"The devil take death!" he shouted, brandishing the skin; "I mean to live! I am rich, I have every virtue; nothing will withstand me. Who would not be generous, when everything is in his power? Aha! Aha! I wished

for two hundred thousand livres a year, and I shall have them. Bow down before me, all of you, wallowing on the carpets like swine in the mire! You all belong to me—a precious property truly! I am rich; I could buy you all, even the deputy snoring over there. Scum of society, give me your benediction! I am the Pope."

Raphael's vociferations had been hitherto drowned by a thorough-bass of snores, but now they became suddenly audible. Most of the sleepers started up with a cry, saw the cause of the disturbance on his feet, tottering uncertainly, and cursed him in concert for a drunken brawler.

"Silence!" shouted Raphael. "Back to your kennels, you dogs! Emile, I have riches, I will give you Havana cigars!"

"I am listening," the poet replied. "Death or Fœdora! On with you! That silky Fœdora deceived you. Women are all daughters of Eve. There is nothing dramatic about that rigmarole of yours."

"Ah, but you were sleeping, slyboots."

"No—'Death or Fœdora!'—I have it!"

"Wake up!" Raphael shouted, beating Emile with the piece of shagreen as if he meant to draw electric fluid out of it.

"*Tonnerre!*" said Emile, springing up and flinging his arms round Raphael; "my friend, remember the sort of women you are with."

"I am a millionnaire!"

"If you are not a millionnaire, you are most certainly drunk."

"Drunk with power. I can kill you!—Silence! I am Nero! I am Nebuchadnezzar!"

"But, Raphael, we are in queer company, and you ought to keep quiet for the sake of your own dignity."

"My life has been silent too long. I mean to have my revenge now on the world at large. I will not amuse myself by squandering paltry five-franc pieces; I will reproduce and sum up my epoch by absorbing human lives, human minds,

and human souls. There are the treasures of pestilence—that is no paltry kind of wealth, is it? I will wrestle with fevers—yellow, blue, or green—with whole armies, with gibbets. I can possess Fœdora—Yet no, I do not want Fœdora; she is a disease; I am dying of Fœdora. I want to forget Fœdora."

"If you keep on calling out like this, I shall take you into the dining-room."

"Do you see this skin? It is Solomon's will. Solomon belongs to me—a little varlet of a king! Arabia is mine, Arabia Petræa to boot; and the universe, and you, too, if I choose. If I choose—Ah! be careful. I can buy up all your journalist's shop; you shall be my valet. You shall be my valet, you shall manage my newspaper. Valet! *valet*, that is to say, free from aches and pains, because he has no brains."

At the word, Emile carried Raphael off into the dining-room.

"All right," he remarked; "yes, my friend, I am your valet. But you are about to be editor-in-chief of a newspaper; so be quiet, and behave properly, for my sake. Have you no regard for me?"

"Regard for you! You shall have Havana cigars, with this bit of shagreen: always with this skin, this supreme bit of shagreen. It is a cure for corns, an efficacious remedy. Do you suffer? I will remove them."

"Never have I known you so senseless—"

"Senseless, my friend? Not at all. The skin contracts whenever I form a wish—'tis a paradox. There is a Brahmin underneath it! The Brahmin must be a droll fellow, for our desires, look you, are bound to expand—"

"Yes, yes—"

"I tell you—"

"Yes, yes, very true, I am quite of your opinion—our desires expand—"

"The skin, I tell you."

"Yes."

"You don't believe me. I know you, my friend; you are as full of lies as a new-made king."

"How can you expect me to follow your drunken maunderings?"

"I will bet you I can prove it. Let us measure it—"

"Goodness! he will never get off to sleep," exclaimed Emile, as he watched Raphael rummaging busily in the dining-room.

Thanks to the peculiar clearness with which external objects are sometimes projected on an inebriated brain, in sharp contrast to its own obscure imaginings, Valentin found an inkstand and a table-napkin, with the quickness of a monkey, repeating all the time—

"Let us measure it! Let us measure it!"

"All right," said Emile; "let us measure it."

The two friends spread out the table-napkin and laid the Wild Ass's Skin upon it. As Emile's hand appeared to be steadier than Raphael's, he drew a line with pen and ink round the talisman, while his friend said—

"I wished for an income of two hundred thousand livres, didn't I? Well, when that comes, you will observe a mighty diminution of my shagreen."

"Yes—now go to sleep. Shall I make you comfortable on that sofa? Now then, are you all right?"

"Yes, my nursling of the press. You shall amuse me; you shall drive the flies away from me. The friend of adversity should be the friend of prosperity. So I will give you some Hava—na—cig—"

"Come, now, sleep. Sleep off your gold, you millionnaire!"

"You sleep off your paragraphs! Good-night! Say good-night to Nebuchadnezzar!—Love! Wine! France!—glory and tr—treas—"

Very soon the snorings of the two friends were added to the music with which the rooms resounded—an ineffectual concert! The lights went out one by one, their crystal sconces cracking in the final flare. Night threw dark

shadows over this prolonged revelry, in which Raphael's narrative had been a second orgy of speech, of words without ideas, of ideas for which words had often been lacking.

Toward noon, next day, the fair Aquilina bestirred herself. She yawned wearily. She had slept with her head upon a painted velvet footstool, and her cheeks were mottled over by contact with the surface. Her movements awoke Euphrasia, who suddenly sprang up with a hoarse cry; her pretty face, that had been so fresh and fair in the evening, was sallow now and pallid; she looked like a candidate for the hospital. The rest awoke also by degrees, with portentous groanings, to feel themselves over in every stiffened limb, and to experience the infinite varieties of weariness that weighed upon them.

A servant came in to throw back the shutters and open the windows. There they all stood, brought back to consciousness by the warm rays of sunlight that shone upon the sleepers' heads. Their movements during slumber had disordered the elaborately arranged hair and toilets of the women. They presented a ghastly spectacle in the bright daylight. Their hair fell ungracefully about them; their eyes, lately so brilliant, were heavy and dim; the expression of their faces was entirely changed. The sickly hues, which daylight brings out so strongly, were frightful. An olive tint had crept over the lymphatic faces, so fair and soft when in repose; the dainty red lips were grown pale and dry, and bore tokens of the degradation of excess. Each disowned his mistress of the night before; the women looked wan and discolored, like flowers trampled underfoot by a passing procession.

The men who scorned them looked even more horrible. Those human faces would have made you shudder. The hollow eyes with the dark circles round them seemed to see nothing; they were dull with wine and stupefied with heavy slumbers that had been exhausting rather than refreshing. There was an indescribable ferocious and stolid bestiality

about these haggard faces, where bare physical appetite appeared shorn of all the poetical illusion with which the intellect invests it. Even these fearless champions, accustomed to measure themselves with excess, were struck with horror at this awakening of vice, stripped of its disguises, at being confronted thus with sin, the skeleton in rags, lifeless and hollow, bereft of the sophistries of the intellect and the enchantments of luxury. Artists and courtesans scrutinized in silence and with haggard glances the surrounding disorder, the rooms where everything had been laid waste, at the havoc wrought by heated passions.

Demoniac laughter broke out when Taillefer, catching the smothered murmurs of his guests, tried to greet them with a grin. His darkly flushed, perspiring countenance loomed upon this pandemonium, like the image of a crime that knows no remorse (see "L'Auberge rouge"). The picture was complete. A picture of a foul life in the midst of luxury, a hideous mixture of the pomp and squalor of humanity; an awakening after the frenzy of Debauch has crushed and squeezed all the fruits of life in her strong hands, till nothing but unsightly refuse is left to her, and lies in which she believes no longer. You might have thought of Death gloating over a family stricken with the plague.

The sweet scents and dazzling lights, the mirth and the excitement were all no more; disgust with its nauseous sensations and searching philosophy was there instead. The sun shone in like truth, the pure outer air was like virtue; in contrast with the heated atmosphere, heavy with the fumes of the previous night of revelry.

Accustomed as they were to their life, many of the girls thought of other days and other wakings; pure and innocent days when they looked out and saw the roses and honeysuckle about the casement, and the fresh countryside without enraptured by the glad music of the skylark; while earth lay in mists, lighted by the dawn, and in all the glittering radiance of dew. Others imagined the family breakfast, the father and children round the table, the innocent laughter,

the unspeakable charm that pervaded it all, the simple hearts and their meal as simple.

An artist mused upon his quiet studio, on his statue in its severe beauty, and the graceful model who was waiting for him. A young man recollected a lawsuit on which the fortunes of a family hung, and an important transaction that needed his presence. The scholar regretted his study and the noble work that called for him. Nearly everybody was sorry for himself. Emile appeared just then as smiling, blooming, and fresh as the smartest assistant in a fashionable shop.

"You are all as ugly as bailiffs. You won't be fit for anything to-day, so this day is lost, and I vote for breakfast."

At this Taillefer went out to give some orders. The women went languidly up to the mirrors to set their toilets in order. Each one shook herself. The wilder sort lectured the steadier ones. The courtesans made fun of those who looked unable to continue the boisterous festivity; but these wan forms revived all at once, stood in groups, and talked and smiled. Some servants quickly and adroitly set the furniture and everything else in its place, and a magnificent breakfast was got ready.

The guests hurried into the dining-room. Everything there bore indelible marks of yesterday's excess, it is true, but there were at any rate some traces of ordinary, rational existence, such traces as may be found in a sick man's dying struggles. And so the revelry was laid away and buried, like carnival of a Shrove Tuesday, by masks wearied out with dancing, drunk with drunkenness, and quite ready to be persuaded of the pleasures of lassitude, lest they should be forced to admit their own exhaustion.

As soon as these bold spirits surrounded the capitalist's breakfast-table, Cardot appeared. He had left the rest to make a night of it after the dinner, and finished the evening after his own fashion in the retirement of domestic life. Just now a sweet smile wandered over his features. He seemed

to have a presentiment that there would be some inheritance to sample and divide, involving inventories and engrossing; an inheritance rich in fees and deeds to draw up, and something as juicy as the trembling fillet of beef in which their host had just plunged his knife.

"Oh, ho! we are to have breakfast in the presence of a notary," cried Cursy.

"You have come here just at the right time," said the banker, indicating the breakfast; "you can jot down the numbers, and initial off all the dishes."

"There is no will to make here, but contracts of marriage there may be, perhaps," said the scholar, who had made a satisfactory arrangement for the first time in twelve months.

"Oh! Oh!"

"Ah! Ah!"

"One moment," cried Cardot, fairly deafened by a chorus of wretched jokes. "I came here on serious business. I am bringing six millions for one of you." (Dead silence.) "Monsieur," he went on, turning to Raphael, who at the moment was unceremoniously wiping his eyes on a corner of the table-napkin, "was not your mother a Mlle. O'Flaharty?"

"Yes," said Raphael mechanically enough; "Barbara Marie."

"Have you your certificate of birth about you," Cardot went on, "and Mme. de Valentin's as well?"

"I believe so."

"Very well then, monsieur; you are the sole heir of Major O'Flaharty, who died in August, 1828, at Calcutta."

"An *incalcuttable* fortune," said the critic.

"The Major having bequeathed several amounts to public institutions in his will, the French Government sent in a claim for the remainder to the East India Company," the notary continued. "The estate is clear and ready to be transferred at this moment. I had been looking in vain for the heirs and assigns of Mlle. Barbara Marie O'Flaharty for a fortnight past, when yesterday at dinner—"

Just then Raphael suddenly staggered to his feet; he looked like a man who has just received a blow. Acclamation took the form of silence, for stifled envy had been the first feeling in every breast, and all eyes devoured him like flames. Then a murmur rose, and grew like the voice of a discontented audience, or the first mutterings of a riot, as everybody made some comment on this news of great wealth brought by the notary.

This abrupt subservience of fate brought Raphael thoroughly to his senses. He immediately spread out the table-napkin with which he had lately taken the measure of the piece of shagreen. He heeded nothing as he laid the talisman upon it, and shuddered involuntarily at the sight of a slight difference between the present size of the skin and the outline traced upon the linen.

"Why, what is the matter with him?" Taillefer cried. "He comes by his fortune very cheaply."

"*Soutiens-le Châtillon!*" said Bixiou to Emile. "The joy will kill him."

A ghastly white hue overspread every line of the wan features of the heir-at-law. His face was drawn, every outline grew haggard; the hollows in his livid countenance grew deeper, and his eyes were fixed and staring. He was facing Death.

The opulent banker, surrounded by faded women, and faces with satiety written on them, the enjoyment that had reached the pitch of agony, was a living illustration of his own life.

Raphael looked thrice at the talisman, which lay passively within the merciless outlines on the table-napkin; he tried not to believe it, but his incredulity vanished utterly before the light of an inner presentiment. The whole world was his; he could have all things, but the will to possess them was utterly extinct. Like a traveller in the midst of the desert, with but a little water left to quench his thirst, he must measure his life by the draughts he took of it. He saw what every desire of his must cost him in the days of his

life. He believed in the powers of the Wild Ass's Skin at last; he listened to every breath he drew; he felt ill already; he asked himself, "Am I not consumptive? Did not my mother die of a lung complaint?"

"Aha, Raphael! what fun you will have! What will you give me?" asked Aquilina.

"Here's to the death of his uncle, Major O'Flaharty! There is a man for you!"

"He will be a peer of France."

"Pooh! what is a peer of France since July?" said the amateur critic.

"Are you going to take a box at the Bouffons?"

"You are going to treat us all, I hope?" put in Bixiou.

"A man of his sort will be sure to do things in style," said Emile.

The hurrah set up by the jovial assembly rang in Valentin's ears, but he could not grasp the sense of a single word. Vague thoughts crossed him of the Breton peasant's life of mechanical labor, without a wish of any kind; he pictured him burdened with a family, tilling the soil, living on buckwheat meal, drinking cider out of a pitcher, believing in the Virgin and the King, taking the sacrament at Easter, dancing of a Sunday on the green sward, and understanding never a word of the rector's sermon. The actual scene that lay before him, the gilded furniture, the courtesans, the feast itself, and the surrounding splendors, seemed to catch him by the throat, and made him cough.

"Do you wish for some asparagus?" the banker cried.

"*I wish for nothing!*" thundered Raphael.

"Bravo!" Taillefer exclaimed; "you understand your position; a fortune confers the privilege of being impertinent. You are one of us. Gentlemen, let us drink to the might of gold! M. Valentin here, six times a millionnaire, has become a power. He is a king, like all the rich; everything is at his disposal, everything lies under his feet. From this time forth the axiom that 'all Frenchmen are alike in the eyes of the law,' is for him a fib at the head of the Constitu-

tional Charter. He is not going to obey the law—the law is going to obey him. There are neither scaffolds nor executioners for millionnaires."

"Yes, there are," said Raphael; "they are their own executioners."

"Here is another victim of prejudices!" cried the banker.

"Let us drink!" Raphael said, putting the talisman into his pocket.

"What are you doing?" said Emile, checking his movement. "Gentlemen," he added, addressing the company, who were rather taken aback by Raphael's behavior, "you must know that our friend Valentin here—what am I saying?—I mean my Lord Marquis de Valentin—is in the possession of a secret for obtaining wealth. His wishes are fulfilled as soon as he knows them. He will make us all rich together, or he is a flunkey, and devoid of all decent feeling."

"Oh, Raphael dear, I should like a set of pearl ornaments!" Euphrasia exclaimed.

"If he has any gratitude in him, he will give me a couple of carriages with fast steppers," said Aquilina.

"Wish for a hundred thousand a year for me!"

"Indian shawls!"

"Pay my debts!"

"Send an apoplexy to my uncle, the old stick!"

"Ten thousand a year in the Funds, and I'll cry quits with you, Raphael!"

"Deeds of gift and no mistake," was the notary's comment.

"He ought, at least, to rid me of the gout!"

"Lower the Funds!" shouted the banker.

These phrases flew about like the last discharge of rockets at the end of a display of fireworks; and were uttered, perhaps, more in earnest than in jest.

"My good friend," Emile said solemnly, "I shall be quite satisfied with an income of two hundred thousand livres. Please to set about it at once."

"Do you not know the cost, Emile?" asked Raphael.

"A nice excuse!" the poet cried; "ought we not to sacrifice ourselves for our friends?"

"I have almost a mind to wish that you all were dead," Valentin made answer, with a dark, inscrutable look at his boon companions.

"Dying people are frightfully cruel," said Emile laughing. "You are rich now," he went on gravely; "very well, I will give you two months at most before you grow vilely selfish. You are so dense already that you cannot understand a joke. You have only to go a little further to believe in your Wild Ass's Skin."

Raphael kept silent, fearing the banter of the company; but he drank immoderately, trying to drown in intoxication the recollection of his fatal power.

III

THE AGONY

IN THE early days of December an old man of some seventy years of age pursued his way along the Rue de Varenne, in spite of the falling rain. He peered up at the door of each house, trying to discover the address of the Marquis Raphael de Valentin, in a simple, childlike fashion, and with the abstracted look peculiar to philosophers. His face plainly showed traces of a struggle between a heavy mortification and an authoritative nature; his long, gray hair hung in disorder about a face like a piece of parchment shrivelling in the fire. If a painter had come upon this curious character, he would, no doubt, have transferred him to his sketch-book on his return, a thin, bony figure, clad in black, and have inscribed beneath it: "Classical poet in search of a rhyme." When he had identified the number that had been given to him, this reincarnation of Rollin knocked meekly at the door of a splendid mansion.

"Is Monsieur Raphael in?" the worthy man inquired of the Swiss in livery.

"My Lord the Marquis sees nobody," said the servant, swallowing a huge morsel that he had just dipped in a large bowl of coffee.

"There is his carriage," said the elderly stranger, pointing to a fine equipage that stood under the wooden canopy that sheltered the steps before the house, in place of a striped linen awning. "He is going out; I will wait for him."

"Then you might wait here till to-morrow morning, old boy," said the Swiss. "A carriage is always waiting for monsieur. Please to go away. If I were to let any stranger come into the house without orders, I should lose an income of six hundred francs."

A tall old man, in a costume not unlike that of a subordinate in the Civil Service, came out of the vestibule and hurried part of the way down the steps, while he made a survey of the astonished elderly applicant for admission.

"What is more, here is M. Jonathan," the Swiss remarked; "speak to him."

Fellow-feeling of some kind, or curiosity, brought the two old men together in a central space in the great entrance-court. A few blades of grass were growing in the crevices of the pavement; a terrible silence reigned in that great house. The sight of Jonathan's face would have made you long to understand the mystery that brooded over it, and that was announced by the smallest trifles about the melancholy place.

When Raphael inherited his uncle's vast estate, his first care had been to seek out the old and devoted servitor of whose affection he knew that he was secure. Jonathan had wept tears of joy at the sight of his young master, of whom he thought he had taken a final farewell; and when the marquis exalted him to the high office of steward, his happiness could not be surpassed. So old Jonathan became an intermediary power between Raphael and the world at large. He was the absolute disposer of his master's fortune, the blind

instrument of an unknown will, and a sixth sense, as it were, by which the emotions of life were communicated to Raphael.

"I should like to speak with M. Raphael, sir," said the elderly person to Jonathan, as he climbed up the steps some way, into a shelter from the rain.

"To speak with my Lord the Marquis?" the steward cried. "He scarcely speaks even to me, his foster-father!"

"But I am likewise his foster-father," said the old man. "If your wife was his foster-mother, I fed him myself with the milk of the Muses. He is my nursling, my child, *carus alumnus!* I formed his mind, cultivated his understanding, developed his genius, and, I venture to say it, to my own honor and glory. Is he not one of the most remarkable men of our epoch? He was one of my pupils in two lower forms, and in rhetoric. I am his professor."

"Ah, sir, then you are M. Porriquet?"

"Exactly, sir; but—"

"Hush! hush!" Jonathan called to two underlings, whose voices broke the monastic silence that shrouded the house.

"But is the marquis ill, sir?" the professor continued.

"My dear sir," Jonathan replied, "Heaven only knows what is the matter with my master. You see, there are not a couple of houses like ours anywhere in Paris. Do you understand? Not two houses. Faith, that there are not. My Lord the Marquis had this hôtel purchased for him; it formerly belonged to a duke and a peer of France; then he spent three hundred thousand francs over furnishing it. That's a good deal, you know, three hundred thousand francs! But every room in the house is a perfect wonder. 'Good,' said I to myself when I saw this magnificence; 'it is just like it used to be in the time of my lord, his late grandfather; and the young marquis is going to entertain all Paris and the Court!' Nothing of the kind! My lord refused to see any one whatever. 'Tis a funny life that he leads, M. Porriquet, you understand. An *inconciliable* life.

He rises every day at the same time. I am the only person, you see, that may enter his room. I open the shutters at seven o'clock, summer or winter. It is all arranged very oddly. As I come in I say to him—

"'You must get up and dress, my Lord Marquis.'

"Then he rises and dresses himself. I have to give him his dressing-gown, and it is always after the same pattern, and of the same material. I am obliged to replace it when it can be used no longer, simply to save him the trouble of asking for a new one. A queer fancy! As a matter of fact, he has a thousand francs to spend every day, and he does as he pleases, the dear child. And besides, I am so fond of him that if he gave me a box on the ear on one side, I should hold out the other to him! The most difficult things he will tell me to do, and yet I do them, you know! He gives me such a lot of trifles to attend to that I am well set to work! He reads the newspapers, doesn't he? Well, my instructions are to put them always in the same place, on the same table. I always go at the same hour and shave him myself; and don't I tremble! The cook would forfeit the annuity of a thousand crowns, that he is to come into after my lord's death, if breakfast is not served *inconciliably* at ten o'clock precisely. The menus are drawn up for the whole year round, day after day. My Lord the Marquis has not a thing to wish for. He has strawberries whenever there are any, and he has the earliest mackerel to be had in Paris. The programme is printed every morning. He knows his dinner by rote. In the next place, he dresses himself at the same hour, in the same clothes, the same linen, that I always put on the same chair, you understand? I have to see that he always has the same cloth; and if it should happen that his coat came to grief (a mere supposition), I should have to replace it by another without saying a word about it to him. If it is fine, I go in and say to my master—

"'You ought to go out, sir.'

"He says Yes, or No. If he has a notion that he will go out, he doesn't wait for his horses; they are always ready

harnessed; the coachman stops there *inconciliably*, whip in hand, just as you see him out there. In the evening, after dinner, my master goes one day to the Opera, the other to the Ital—no, he hasn't yet gone to the Italiens, though, for I could not find a box for him until yesterday. Then he comes in at eleven o'clock precisely, to go to bed. At any time in the day when he has nothing to do, he reads—he is always reading, you see—it is a notion he has. My instructions are to read the 'Journal de la Librairie' before he sees it, and to buy new books, so that he finds them on his chimney-piece on the very day that they are published. I have orders to go into his room every hour or so, to look after the fire and everything else, and to see that he wants nothing. He gave me a little book, sir, to learn off by heart, with all my duties written in it—a regular catechism! In summer I have to keep a cool and even temperature with blocks of ice, and at all seasons to put fresh flowers all about. He is rich! He has a thousand francs to spend every day; he can indulge his fancies! And he hadn't even necessaries for so long, poor child! He doesn't annoy anybody; he is as good as gold; he never opens his mouth, for instance; the house and garden are absolutely silent. In short, my master has not a single wish left; everything comes in the twinkling of an eye, if he raises his hand, and *instanter*. Quite right, too. If servants are not looked after, everything falls into confusion. You would never believe the lengths he goes about things. His rooms are all—what do you call it?—er—er—*en suite*. Very well; just suppose, now, that he opens his room door or the door of his study; presto! all the other doors fly open of themselves by a patent contrivance; and then he can go from one end of the house to the other and not find a single door shut; which is all very nice and pleasant and convenient for us great folk! But, on my word, it cost us a lot of money! And, after all, M. Porriquet, he said to me at last—

"'Jonathan, you will look after me as if I were a baby in long clothes.' Yes, sir, 'long clothes!' those were his

very words. 'You will think of all my requirements for me.' I am the master, so to speak, and he is the servant, you understand? The reason of it? Ah, my word, that is just what nobody on earth knows but he himself and God Almighty. It is quite *inconciliable!*"

"He is writing a poem!" exclaimed the old professor.

"You think he is writing a poem, sir? It's a very absorbing affair, then! But, you know, I don't think he is. He often tells me that he wants to live like a *vergetation;* he wants to *vergetate.* Only yesterday he was looking at a tulip while he was dressing, and he said to me—

" 'There is my own life—I am *vergetating*, my poor Jonathan.' Now, some of them insist that that is monomania. It is *inconciliable!*"

"All this makes it very clear to me, Jonathan," the professor answered, with a magisterial solemnity that greatly impressed the old servant, "that your master is absorbed in a great work. He is deep in vast meditations, and has no wish to be distracted by the petty preoccupations of ordinary life. A man of genius forgets everything among his intellectual labors. One day the famous Newton—"

"Newton?—oh, ah! I don't know the name," said Jonathan.

"Newton, a great geometrician," Porriquet went on, "once sat for twenty-four hours leaning his elbow on the table; when he emerged from his musings, he was a day out in his reckonings, just as if he had been sleeping. I will go to see him, dear lad; I may perhaps be of some use to him."

"Not for a moment!" Jonathan cried. "Not though you were King of France—I mean the real old one. You could not go in unless you forced the doors open and walked over my body. But I will go and tell him you are here, M. Porriquet, and I will put it to him like this, 'Ought he to come up?' And he will say Yes or No. I never say, 'Do you wish?' or 'Will you?' or 'Do you want?' Those words are scratched out of the dictionary. He let out at me once with a 'Do you want to kill me?' he was so very angry.

Jonathan left the old schoolmaster in the vestibule, signing to him to come no further, and soon returned with a favorable answer. He led the old gentleman through one magnificent room after another, where every door stood open. At last Porriquet beheld his pupil at some distance seated beside the fire.

Raphael was reading the paper. He sat in an armchair, wrapped in a dressing-gown with some large pattern on it. The intense melancholy that preyed upon him could be discerned in his languid posture and feeble frame; it was depicted on his brow and white face; he looked like some plant bleached by darkness. There was a kind of effeminate grace about him; the fancies peculiar to wealthy invalids were also noticeable. His hands were soft and white, like a pretty woman's; he wore his fair hair, now grown scanty, curled about his temples with a refinement of vanity.

The Greek cap that he wore was pulled to one side by the weight of its tassel; too heavy for the light material of which it was made. He had let the paper-knife fall at his feet, a malachite blade with gold mounting, which he had used to cut the leaves of a book. The amber mouthpiece of a magnificent Indian hookah lay on his knee; the enamelled coils lay like a serpent in the room, but he had forgotten to draw out its fresh perfume. And yet there was a complete contradiction between the general feebleness of his young frame and the blue eyes, where all his vitality seemed to dwell; an extraordinary intelligence seemed to look out from them and to grasp everything at once.

That expression was painful to see. Some would have read despair in it, and others some inner conflict terrible as remorse. It was the inscrutable glance of helplessness that must perforce consign its desires to the depths of its own heart; or of a miser enjoying in imagination all the pleasures that his money could procure for him, while he declines to lessen his hoard; the look of a bound Prometheus, of the fallen Napoleon of 1815, when he learned at the Elysée the strategical blunder that his enemies had made, and asked

for twenty-four hours of command in vain; or rather it was the same look that Raphael had turned upon the Seine, or upon his last piece of gold at the gaming-table only a few months ago.

He was submitting his intelligence and his will to the homely common-sense of an old peasant whom fifty years of domestic service had scarcely civilized. He had given up all the rights of life in order to live; he had despoiled his soul of all the romance that lies in a wish; and almost rejoiced at thus becoming a sort of automaton. The better to struggle with the cruel power that he had challenged, he had followed Origen's example, and had maimed and chastened his imagination.

The day after he had seen the diminution of the Wild Ass's Skin, at his sudden accession of wealth, he happened to be at his notary's house. A well-known physician had told them quite seriously, at dessert, how a Swiss attacked by consumption had cured himself. The man had never spoken a word for ten years, and had compelled himself to draw six breaths only, every minute, in the close atmosphere of a cow-house, adhering all the time to a regimen of exceedingly light diet. "I will be like that man," thought Raphael to himself. He wanted life at any price, and so he led the life of a machine in the midst of all the luxury around him.

The old professor confronted this youthful corpse and shuddered; there seemed something unnatural about the meagre, enfeebled frame. In the marquis, with his eager eyes and careworn forehead, he could hardly recognize the fresh-cheeked and rosy pupil with the active limbs, whom he remembered. If the worthy classicist, sage critic, and general preserver of the traditions of correct taste had read Byron, he would have thought that he had come on a Manfred when he looked to find Childe Harold.

"Good-day, Père Porriquet," said Raphael, pressing the old schoolmaster's frozen fingers in his own hot damp ones; "how are you?"

"I am very well," replied the other, alarmed by the touch of that feverish hand. "But how about you?"

"Oh, I am hoping to keep myself in health."

"You are engaged on some great work, no doubt?"

"No," Raphael answered. "*Exegi monumentum*, Père Porriquet; I have contributed an important page to science, and have now bidden her farewell forever. I scarcely know where my manuscript is."

"The style is no doubt correct?" queried the schoolmaster. "You, I hope, would never have adopted the barbarous language of the new school, which fancies it has worked such wonders by discovering Ronsard!"

"My work treats of physiology pure and simple."

"Oh, then, there is no more to be said," the schoolmaster answered. "Grammar must yield to the exigencies of discovery. Nevertheless, young man, a lucid and harmonious style—the diction of Massillon, of M. de Buffon, of the great Racine—a classical style, in short, can never spoil anything—But, my friend," the schoolmaster interrupted himself, "I was forgetting the object of my visit, which concerns my own interests."

Too late Raphael recalled to mind the verbose eloquence and elegant circumlocutions which in a long professorial career had grown habitual to his old tutor, and almost regretted that he had admitted him; but just as he was about to wish to see him safely outside, he promptly suppressed his secret desire with a stealthy glance at the Wild Ass's Skin. It hung there before him, fastened down upon some white material, surrounded by a red line accurately traced about its prophetic outlines. Since that fatal carouse, Raphael had stifled every least whim, and had lived so as not to cause the slightest movement in the terrible talisman. The Wild Ass's Skin was like a tiger with which he must live without exciting its ferocity. He bore patiently, therefore, with the old schoolmaster's prolixity.

Porriquet spent an hour in telling him about the persecutions directed against him ever since the Revolution of

July. The worthy man, having a liking for strong governments, had expressed the patriotic wish that grocers should be left to their counters, statesmen to the management of public business, advocates to the Palais de Justice, and peers of France to the Luxembourg; but one of the popularity-seeking ministers of the Citizen King had ousted him from his chair, on an accusation of Charlism, and the old man now found himself without pension or post, and with no bread to eat. As he played the part of guardian angel to a poor nephew, for whose schooling at Saint Sulpice he was paying, he came less on his own account than for his adopted child's sake, to entreat his former pupil's interest with the new minister. He did not ask to be reinstated, but only for a position at the head of some provincial school.

Raphael had fallen a victim to unconquerable drowsiness by the time that the worthy man's monotonous voice ceased to sound in his ears. Civility had compelled him to look at the pale and unmoving eyes of the deliberate and tedious old narrator, till he himself had reached stupefaction, magnetized in an inexplicable way by the power of inertia.

"Well, my dear Père Porriquet," he said, not very certain what the question was to which he was replying, "but I can do nothing for you, nothing at all. *I wish very heartily* that you may succeed—"

All at once, without seeing the change wrought on the old man's sallow and wrinkled brow by these conventional phrases, full of indifference and selfishness, Raphael sprang to his feet like a startled roebuck. He saw a thin white line between the black piece of hide and the red tracing about it, and gave a cry so fearful that the poor professor was frightened by it.

"Old fool! Go!" he cried. "You will be appointed as headmaster! Couldn't you have asked me for an annuity of a thousand crowns rather than a murderous wish? Your visit would have cost me nothing. There are a hundred thousand situations to be had in France, but I have only one

life. A man's life is worth more than all the situations in the world.—Jonathan!"

Jonathan appeared.

"This is your doing, double-distilled idiot! What made you suggest that I should see M. Porriquet?" and he pointed to the old man, who was petrified with fright. "Did I put myself into your hands for you to tear me in pieces? You have just shortened my life by ten years! Another blunder of this kind, and you will lay me where I have laid my father. Would I not far rather have possessed the beautiful Fœdora? And I have obliged that old hulk instead—that rag of humanity! I had money enough for him. And, moreover, if all the Porriquets in the world were dying of hunger, what is that to me?"

Raphael's face was white with anger; a slight froth marked his trembling lips; there was a savage gleam in his eyes. The two elders shook with terror in his presence like two children at the sight of a snake. The young man fell back in his armchair, a kind of reaction took place in him, the tears flowed fast from his angry eyes.

"Oh, my life!" he cried, "that fair life of mine. Never to know a kindly thought again, to love no more; nothing is left to me!"

He turned to the professor and went on in a gentle voice —"The harm is done, my old friend. Your services have been well repaid; and my misfortune has at any rate contributed to the welfare of a good and worthy man."

His tones betrayed so much feeling that the almost unintelligible words drew tears from the two old men, such tears as are shed over some pathetic song in a foreign tongue.

"He is epileptic," muttered Porriquet.

"I understand your kind intentions, my friend," Raphael answered gently. "You would make excuses for me. Ill-health cannot be helped, but ingratitude is a grievous fault. Leave me now," he added. "To-morrow or the next day, or possibly to-night, you will receive your appointment; Resistance has triumphed over Motion. Farewell."

The old schoolmaster went away, full of keen apprehension as to Valentin's sanity. A thrill of horror ran through him, there had been something supernatural, he thought, in the scene he had passed through. He could hardly believe his own impressions, and questioned them like one awakened from a painful dream.

"Now attend to me, Jonathan," said the young man to his old servant. "Try to understand the charge confided to you."

"Yes, my Lord Marquis."

"I am as a man outlawed from humanity."

"Yes, my Lord Marquis."

"All the pleasures of life disport themselves round my bed of death, and dance about me like fair women; but if I beckon to them, I must die. Death always confronts me. You must be the barrier between the world and me."

"Yes, my Lord Marquis," said the old servant, wiping the drops of perspiration from his wrinkled forehead. "But if you don't wish to see pretty women, how will you manage at the Italiens this evening? An English family is returning to London, and I have taken their box for the rest of the season, and it is in a splendid position—superb; in the first row."

Raphael, deep in his own musings, paid no attention to him.

Do you see that splendid equipage, a brougham painted a dark brown color, but with the arms of an ancient and noble family shining from the panels? As it rolls past, all the shop-girls admire it, and look longingly at the yellow satin lining, the rugs from la Savonnerie, the daintiness and freshness of every detail, the silken cushions and tightly-fitting glass windows. Two liveried footmen are mounted behind this aristocratic carriage; and within, a head lies back among the silken cushions, the feverish face and hollow eyes of Raphael, melancholy and sad. Emblem of the doom of wealth! He flies across Paris like a rocket, and reaches the peristyle of the Théâtre Favart. The passers-by make way

for him; the two footmen help him to alight, an envious crowd looking on the while.

"What has that fellow done to be so rich?" asks a poor law-student, who cannot listen to the magical music of Rossini for lack of a five-franc piece.

Raphael walked slowly along the gangway; he expected no enjoyment from these pleasures he had once coveted so eagerly. In the interval before the second act of "Semiramide" he walked up and down in the lobby, and along the corridors, leaving his box, which he had not yet entered, to look after itself. The instinct of property was dead within him already. Like all invalids, he thought of nothing but his own sufferings. He was leaning against the chimney-piece in the greenroom. A group had gathered about it of dandies, young and old, of ministers and ex-ministers, of peers without peerages, and peerages without peers, for so the Revolution of July had ordered matters. Among a host of adventurers and journalists, in fact, Raphael beheld a strange, unearthly figure a few paces away among the crowd. He went toward this grotesque object to see it better, half-closing his eyes with exceeding superciliousness.

"What a wonderful bit of painting!" he said to himself. The stranger's hair and eyebrows and a Mazarin tuft on the chin had been dyed black, but the result was a spurious, glossy, purple tint that varied its hues according to the light; the hair had been too white, no doubt, to take the preparation. Anxiety and cunning were depicted in the narrow, insignificant face, with its wrinkles incrusted by thick layers of red and white paint. This red enamel, lacking on some portions of his face, strongly brought out his natural feebleness and livid hues. It was impossible not to smile at this visage with the protuberant forehead and pointed chin, a face not unlike those grotesque wooden figures that German herdsmen carve in their spare moments.

An attentive observer looking from Raphael to this elderly Adonis would have remarked a young man's eyes set in a mask of age, in the case of the marquis, and in the

other case the dim eyes of age peering forth from behind a mask of youth. Valentin tried to recollect when and where he had seen this little old man before. He was thin, fastidiously cravatted, booted and spurred like one-and-twenty; he crossed his arms and clinked his spurs as if he possessed all the wanton energy of youth. He seemed to move about without constraint or difficulty. He had carefully buttoned up his fashionable coat, which disguised his powerful, elderly frame, and gave him the appearance of an antiquated coxcomb who still follows the fashions.

For Raphael this animated puppet possessed all the interest of an apparition. He gazed at it as if it had been some smoke-begrimed Rembrandt, recently restored and newly framed. This idea found him a clew to the truth among his confused recollections; he recognized the dealer in antiquities, the man to whom he owed his calamities!

A noiseless laugh broke just then from the fantastical personage, straightening the line of his lips that stretched across a row of artificial teeth. That laugh brought out, for Raphael's heated fancy, a strong resemblance between the man before him and the type of head that painters have assigned to Goethe's Mephistopheles. A crowd of superstitious thoughts entered Raphael's sceptical mind; he was convinced of the powers of the devil and of all the sorcerer's enchantments embodied in medieval tradition, and since worked up by poets. Shrinking in horror from the destiny of Faust, he prayed for the protection of Heaven with all the ardent faith of a dying man in God and the Virgin. A clear, bright radiance seemed to give him a glimpse of the heaven of Michelangelo or of Rafael of Urbino: a venerable white-bearded man, a beautiful woman seated in an aureole above the clouds and winged cherub heads. Now he had grasped and received the meaning of those imaginative, almost human creations; they seemed to explain what had happened to him, to leave him yet one hope.

But when the greenroom of the Italiens returned upon

his sight, he beheld not the Virgin, but a very handsome young person. The execrable Euphrasia, in all the splendor of her toilet, with its orient pearls, had come thither, impatient for her ardent, elderly admirer. She was insolently exhibiting herself with her defiant face and glittering eyes to an envious crowd of stockbrokers, a visible testimony to the inexhaustible wealth that the old dealer permitted her to squander.

Raphael recollected the mocking wish with which he had accepted the old man's luckless gift, and tasted all the sweets of revenge when he beheld the spectacle of sublime wisdom fallen to such a depth as this, wisdom for which such humiliation had seemed a thing impossible. The centenarian greeted Euphrasia with a ghastly smile, receiving her honeyed words in reply. He offered her his emaciated arm and went twice or thrice round the greenroom with her; the envious glances and compliments with which the crowd received his mistress delighted him; he did not see the scornful smiles, nor hear the caustic comments to which he gave rise.

"In what cemetery did this young ghoul unearth that corpse of hers?" asked the dandy of the Romantic faction.

Euphrasia began to smile. The speaker was a slender, fair-haired youth, with bright blue eyes, and a mustache. His short dresscoat, hat tilted over one ear, and sharp tongue, all denoted the species.

"How many old men," said Raphael to himself, "bring an upright, virtuous, and hard-working life to a close in folly! His feet are cold already, and he is making love."

"Well, sir," exclaimed Valentin, stopping the merchant's progress, and staring hard at Euphrasia, "have you quite forgotten the stringent maxims of your philosophy?"

"Ah, I am as happy now as a young man," said the other, in a cracked voice. "I used to look at existence from a wrong standpoint. One hour of love has a whole life in it."

The playgoers heard the bell ring, and left the green

room to take their places again. Raphael and the old merchant separated. As he entered his box, the marquis saw Fœdora sitting exactly opposite to him on the other side of the theatre. The countess had probably only just come, for she was just flinging off her scarf to leave her throat uncovered, and was occupied with going through all the indescribable manœuvres of a coquette arranging herself. All eyes were turned upon her. A young peer of France had come with her; she asked him for the lorgnette which she had given him to carry. Raphael knew the despotism to which his successor had resigned himself, in her gestures, and in the way she treated her companion. He was also under the spell no doubt, another dupe beating with all the might of a real affection against the woman's cold calculations, enduring all the tortures from which Valentin had luckily freed himself.

Fœdora's face lighted up with indescribable joy. After directing her lorgnette upon every box in turn, to make a rapid survey of all the dresses, she was conscious that by her toilet and her beauty she had eclipsed the loveliest and best-dressed women in Paris. She laughed to show her white teeth; her head with its wreath of flowers was never still, in her quest of admiration. Her glances went from one box to another, as she diverted herself with the awkward way in which a Russian princess wore her bonnet, or over the utter failure of a bonnet with which a banker's daughter had disfigured herself.

All at once she met Raphael's steady gaze and turned pale, aghast at the intolerable contempt in her rejected lover's eyes. Not one of her exiled suitors had failed to own her power over them; Valentin alone was proof against her attractions. A power that can be defied with impunity is drawing to its end. This axiom is as deeply engraved on the heart of woman as in the minds of kings. In Raphael, therefore, Fœdora saw the deathblow of her influence and her ability to please. An epigram of his, made at the Opera the day before, was already known in the salons of Paris.

The biting edge of that terrible speech had already given the countess an incurable wound. We know how to cauterize a wound, but we know of no treatment as yet for the stab of a phrase. As every other woman in the house looked by turns at her and at the marquis, Fœdora would have consigned them all to the oubliettes of some Bastille; for in spite of her capacity for dissimulation, her discomfiture was discerned by her rivals. Her unfailing consolation had slipped from her at last. The delicious thought, "I am the most beautiful," the thought that at all times had soothed every mortification, had turned into a lie.

At the opening of the second act a woman took up her position not very far from Raphael, in a box that had been empty hitherto. A murmur of admiration went up from the whole house. In that sea of human faces there was a movement of every living wave; all eyes were turned upon the stranger lady. The applause of young and old was so prolonged that when the orchestra began, the musicians turned to the audience to request silence, and then they themselves joined in the plaudits and swelled the confusion. Excited talk began in every box, every woman equipped herself with an opera glass, elderly men grew young again, and polished the glasses of their lorgnettes with their gloves. The enthusiasm subsided by degrees, the stage echoed with the voices of the singers, and order reigned as before. The aristocratic section, ashamed of having yielded to a spontaneous feeling, again assumed their wonted politely frigid manner. The well-to-do dislike to be astonished at anything; at the first sight of a beautiful thing it becomes their duty to discover the defect in it which absolves them from admiring it—the feeling of all ordinary minds. Yet a few still remained motionless and heedless of the music, artlessly absorbed in the delight of watching Raphael's neighbor.

Valentin noticed Taillefer's mean, obnoxious countenance by Aquilina's side in a lower box, and received an approving smirk from him. Then he saw Emile, who seemed to say from where he stood in the orchestra, "Just look at that

lovely creature there, close beside you!" Lastly, he saw Rastignac, with Mme. de Nucingen and her daughter, twisting his gloves like a man in despair, because he was tethered to his place, and could not leave it to go any nearer to the unknown fair divinity.

Raphael's life depended upon a covenant that he had made with himself, and had hitherto kept sacred. He would give no special heed to any woman whatever; and the better to guard against temptation, he used a cunningly contrived opera-glass which destroyed the harmony of the fairest features by hideous distortions. He had not recovered from the terror that had seized on him in the morning when, at a mere expression of civility, the Wild Ass's Skin had contracted so abruptly. So Raphael was determined not to turn his face in the direction of his neighbor. He sat imperturbable as a duchess with his back against the corner of the box, thereby shutting out half of his neighbor's view of the stage, appearing to disregard her, and even to be unaware that a pretty woman sat there just behind him.

His neighbor copied Valentin's position exactly; she leaned her elbow on the edge of her box and turned her face in three-quarter profile upon the singers on the stage, as if she were sitting to a painter. These two people looked like two estranged lovers still sulking, still turning their backs upon each other, who will go into each other's arms at the first tender word.

Now and again his neighbor's ostrich feathers or her hair came in contact with Raphael's head, giving him a pleasurable thrill, against which he sternly fought. In a little while he felt the touch of the soft frill of lace that went round her dress; he could hear the gracious sounds of the folds of her dress itself, light rustling noises full of enchantment; he could even feel her movements as she breathed, with the gentle stir thus imparted to her form and to her draperies it seemed to Raphael that all her being was suddenly communicated to him in an electric spark. The lace and tulle that caressed him imparted the delicious warmth of her bare,

white shoulders. By a freak in the ordering of things, these two creatures, kept apart by social conventions, with the abysses of death between them, breathed together and perhaps thought of one another. Finally, the subtle perfume of aloes completed the work of Raphael's intoxication. Opposition heated his imagination, and his fancy, become the wilder for the limits imposed upon it, sketched a woman for him in outlines of fire. He turned abruptly, the stranger made a similar movement, startled no doubt at being brought in contact with a stranger; and they remained face to face, each with the same thought.

"Pauline!"

"M. Raphael!"

Each surveyed the other, both of them petrified with astonishment. Raphael noticed Pauline's daintily simple costume. A woman's experienced eyes would have discerned and admired the outlines beneath the modest gauze folds of her bodice and the lily whiteness of her throat. And then her more than mortal clearness of soul, her maidenly modesty, her graceful bearing, all were unchanged. Her sleeve was quivering with agitation, for the beating of her heart was shaking her whole frame.

"Come to the Hotel de Saint-Quentin to-morrow for your papers," she said. "I will be there at noon. Be punctual."

She rose hastily, and disappeared. Raphael thought of following Pauline, feared to compromise her, and stayed. He looked at Fœdora; she seemed to him positively ugly. Unable to understand a single phrase of the music, and feeling stifled in the theatre, he went out, and returned home with a full heart.

"Jonathan," he said to the old servant, as soon as he lay in bed, "give me half a drop of laudanum on a piece of sugar, and don't wake me to-morrow till twenty minutes to twelve."

"I want Pauline to love me!" he cried next morning, looking at the talisman the while in unspeakable anguish.

The skin did not move in the least; it seemed to have

lost its power to shrink; doubtless it could not fulfil a wish fulfilled already.

"Ah!" exclaimed Raphael, feeling as if a mantle of lead had fallen away, which he had worn ever since the day when the talisman had been given to him; "so you are playing me false, you are not obeying me, the pact is broken! I am free; I shall live. Then was it all a wretched joke?" But he did not dare to believe in his own thought as he uttered it.

He dressed himself as simply as had formerly been his wont, and set out on foot for his old lodging, trying to go back in fancy to the happy days when he abandoned himself without peril to vehement desires, the days when he had not yet condemned all human enjoyment. As he walked he beheld Pauline—not the Pauline of the Hotel Saint-Quentin, but the Pauline of last evening. Here was the accomplished mistress he had so often dreamed of, the intelligent young girl with the loving nature and artistic temperament, who understood poets, who understood poetry, and lived in luxurious surroundings. Here, in short, was Fœdora, gifted with a great soul; or Pauline become a countess, and twice a millionnaire, as Fœdora had been. When he reached the worn threshold, and stood upon the broken step at the door, where in old days he had had so many desperate thoughts, an old woman came out of the room within and spoke to him.

"You are M. Raphael de Valentin, are you not?"

"Yes, good mother," he replied.

"You know your old room then," she replied; "you are expected up there."

"Does Mme. Gaudin still own the house?" Raphael asked.

"Oh no, sir. Mme. Gaudin is a baroness now. She lives in a fine house of her own on the other side of the river. Her husband has come back. My goodness, he brought back thousands and thousands. They say she could buy up all the Quartier Saint-Jacques if she liked. She gave me her basement room for nothing, and the remainder of her

lease. Ah, she's a kind woman all the same; she is no more proud to-day than she was yesterday."

Raphael hurried up the staircase to his garret; as he reached the last few steps he heard the sounds of a piano. Pauline was there, simply dressed in a cotton gown, but the way that it was made, like the gloves, hat, and shawl that she had thrown down carelessly upon the bed, revealed a change of fortune.

"Ah, there you are!" cried Pauline, turning her head, and rising with unconcealed delight.

Raphael went to sit beside her, flushed, confused, and happy; he looked at her in silence.

"Why did you leave us then?" she asked, dropping her eyes as the flush deepened on his face. "What became of you?"

"Ah, I have been very miserable, Pauline; I am very miserable still."

"Alas!" she said, filled with pitying tenderness. "I guessed your fate yesterday when I saw you so well dressed, and apparently so wealthy; but in reality? Eh, M. Raphael, is it as it always used to be with you?"

Valentin could not restrain the tears that sprang to his eyes.

"Pauline," he exclaimed, "I—"

He went no further, love sparkled in his eyes, and his emotion overflowed his face.

"Oh, he loves me! he loves me!" cried Pauline.

Raphael felt himself unable to say one word; he bent his head. The young girl took his hand at this; she pressed it as she said, half sobbing and half laughing—

"Rich, rich, happy and rich! Your Pauline is rich. But I? Oh, I ought to be very poor to-day. I have said, times without number, that I would give all the wealth upon this earth for those words, 'He loves me!' Oh, my Raphael! I have millions. You like luxury, you will be glad; but you must love me and my heart besides, for there is so much love for you in my heart. You don't know? My father

has come back. I am a wealthy heiress. Both he and my mother leave me completely free to decide my own fate. I am free—do you understand?"

Seized with a kind of frenzy, Raphael grasped Pauline's hands and kissed them eagerly and vehemently, with an almost convulsive caress. Pauline drew her hands away, laid them on Raphael's shoulders, and drew him toward her. They understood one another—in that close embrace, in the unalloyed and sacred fervor of that one kiss without an afore-thought—the first kiss by which two souls take possession of each other.

"Ah, I will not leave you any more," said Pauline, falling back in her chair. "I do not know how I come to be so bold!" she added, blushing.

"Bold, my Pauline? Do not fear it. It is love, love true and deep and everlasting like my own, is it not?"

"Speak!" she cried. "Go on speaking, so long your lips have been dumb for me."

"Then you have loved me all along?"

"Loved you? *Mon Dieu!* How often I have wept here, setting your room straight, and grieving for your poverty and my own. I would have sold myself to the evil one to spare you one vexation! You are *my* Raphael to-day, really my own Raphael, with that handsome head of yours, and your heart is mine too; yes, that above all, your heart—oh, wealth inexhaustible! Well, where was I?" she went on after a pause. "Oh, yes! We have three, four, or five millions, I believe. If I were poor, I should perhaps desire to bear your name, to be acknowledged as your wife; but as it is, I would give up the whole world for you, I would be your servant still, now and always. Why, Raphael, if I give you my fortune, my heart, myself to-day, I do no more than I did that day when I put a certain five-franc piece in the drawer there," and she pointed to the table. "Oh, how your exultation hurt me then!"

"Oh, why are you rich?" Raphael cried; "why is there no vanity in you? I can do nothing for you."

He wrung his hands in despair and happiness and love.

"When you are the Marquise de Valentin, I know that the title and the fortune for thee, heavenly soul, will not be worth—"

"One hair of your head," she cried.

"I have millions too. But what is wealth to either of us now? There is my life—ah, that I can offer, take it."

"Your love, Raphael, your love is all the world to me. Are your thoughts of me? I am the happiest of the happy!"

"Can any one overhear us?" asked Raphael.

"Nobody," she replied, and a mischievous gesture escaped her.

"Come, then!" cried Valentin, holding out his arms.

She sprang upon his knees and clasped her arms about his neck.

"Kiss me!" she cried, "after all the pain you have given me; to blot out the memory of the grief that your joys have caused me; and for the sake of the nights that I spent in painting hand-screens—"

"Those hand-screens of yours?"

"Now that we are rich, my darling, I can tell you all about it. Poor boy! how easy it is to delude a clever man! Could you have had white waistcoats and clean shirts twice a week for three francs every month to the laundress? Why, you used to drink twice as much milk as your money would have paid for. I deceived you all round—over firing, oil, and even money. Oh, Raphael mine, don't have me for your wife, I am far too cunning!" she said laughing.

"But how did you manage?"

"I used to work till two o'clock in the morning; I gave my mother half the money made by my screens, and the other half went to you."

They looked at one another for a moment, both bewildered by love and gladness.

"Some day we shall have to pay for this happiness by some terrible sorrow," cried Raphael.

"Perhaps you are married?" said Pauline. "Oh, I will not give you up to any other woman."

"I am free, my beloved."

"Free!" she repeated. "Free, and mine!"

She slipped down upon her knees, clasped her hands, and looked at Raphael in an enthusiasm of devotion.

"I am afraid I shall go mad. How handsome you are!" she went on, passing her fingers through her lover's fair hair. "How stupid your Countess Fœdora is! How pleased I was yesterday with the homage they all paid to me! *She* has never been applauded. Dear, when I felt your arm against my back, I heard a vague voice within me that cried, 'He is there!' and I turned round and saw you. I fled, for I longed so to throw my arms about you before them all."

"How happy you are—you can speak!" Raphael exclaimed. "My heart is overwhelmed; I would weep, but I cannot. Do not draw your hand away. I could stay here looking at you like this for the rest of my life, I think; happy and content."

"Oh, my love, say that once more!"

"Ah, what are words?" answered Valentin, letting a hot tear fall on Pauline's hands. "Some time I will try to tell you of my love; just now I can only feel it."

"You," she said, "with your lofty soul and your great genius, with that heart of yours that I know so well; are you really mine, as I am yours?"

"For ever and ever, my sweet creature," said Raphael in an uncertain voice. "You shall be my wife, my protecting angel. My griefs have always been dispelled by your presence, and my courage revived; that angelic smile now on your lips has purified me, so to speak. A new life seems about to begin for me. The cruel past and my wretched follies are hardly more to me than evil dreams. At your side I breathe an atmosphere of happiness, and I am pure. Be with me always," he added, pressing her solemnly to his beating heart.

"Death may come when it will," said Pauline in ecstasy; "I have lived!"

Happy he who shall divine their joy, for he must have experienced it.

"I wish that no one might enter this dear garret again, my Raphael," said Pauline, after two hours of silence.

"We must have the door walled up, put bars across the window, and buy the house," the marquis answered.

"Yes, we will," she said. Then, a moment later, she added: "Our search for your manuscripts has been a little lost sight of," and they both laughed like children.

"Pshaw! I don't care a jot for the whole circle of the sciences," Raphael answered.

"Ah, sir, and how about glory?"

"I glory in you alone."

"You used to be very miserable as you made these little scratches and scrawls," she said, turning the papers over.

"My Pauline—"

"Oh, yes, I am your Pauline—and what then?"

"Where are you living now?"

"In the Rue Saint Lazare. And you?"

"In the Rue de Varenne."

"What a long way apart we shall be until—" She stopped, and looked at her lover with a mischievous and coquettish expression.

"But at the most we need only be separated for a fortnight," Raphael answered.

"Really! we are to be married in a fortnight?" and she jumped for joy like a child.

"I am an unnatural daughter!" she went on. "I give no more thought to my father or my mother, or to anything in the world. Poor love, you don't know that my father is very ill? He returned from the Indies in very bad health. He nearly died at Havre, where we went to find him. Good heavens!" she cried, looking at her watch; "it is three o'clock already! I ought to be back again when he wakes at four. I am mistress of the house at home; my mother does every-

thing that I wish, and my father worships me; but I will not abuse their kindness, that would be wrong. My poor father! He would have me go to the Italiens yesterday. You will come to see him to-morrow, will you not?"

"Will Madame la Marquise de Valentin honor me by taking my arm?"

"I am going to take the key of this room away with me," she said. "Isn't our treasure-house a palace?"

"One more kiss, Pauline."

"A thousand, *Mon Dieu!*" she said, looking at Raphael. "Will it always be like this? I feel as if I were dreaming."

They went slowly down the stairs together, step for step, with arms closely linked, trembling both of them beneath their load of joy. Each pressing close to the other's side, like a pair of doves, they reached the Place de la Sorbonne, where Pauline's carriage was waiting.

"I want to go home with you," she said. "I want to see your own room and your study, and to sit at the table where you work. It will be like old times," she said, blushing.

She spoke to the servant. "Joseph, before returning home I am going to the Rue de Varenne. It is a quarter-past three now, and I must be back again by four o'clock. George must hurry the horses." And so in a few moments the lovers came to Valentin's abode.

"How glad I am to have seen all this for myself!" Pauline cried, creasing the silken bed-curtains in Raphael's room between her fingers. "As I go to sleep, I shall be here in thought. I shall imagine your dear head on the pillow there. Raphael, tell me, did no one advise you about the furniture of your hotel?"

"No one whatever."

"Really? It was not a woman who—"

"Pauline!"

"Oh, I know I am fearfully jealous. You have good taste. I will have a bed like yours to-morrow."

Quite beside himself with happiness, Raphael caught Pauline in his arms.

"Oh, my father!" she said; "my father—"

"I will take you back to him," cried Valentin, "for I want to be away from you as little as possible."

"How loving you are! I did not venture to suggest it—"

"Are you not my life?"

It would be tedious to set down accurately the charming prattle of the lovers, for tones and looks and gestures that cannot be rendered alone gave it significance. Valentin went back with Pauline to her own door, and returned with as much happiness in his heart as mortal man can know.

When he was seated in his armchair beside the fire, thinking over the sudden and complete way in which his wishes had been fulfilled, a cold shiver went through him, as if the blade of a dagger had been plunged into his breast—he thought of the Wild Ass's Skin, and saw that it had shrunk a little. He uttered the most tremendous of French oaths, without any of the Jesuitical reservations made by the Abbess of Andouillettes, leaned his head against the back of the chair, and sat motionless, fixing his unseeing eyes upon the bracket of the curtain pole.

"Good God!" he cried; "every wish! Every desire of mine! Poor Pauline!—"

He took a pair of compasses and measured the extent of existence that the morning had cost him.

"I have scarcely enough for two months!" he said.

A cold sweat broke out over him; moved by an ungovernable spasm of rage, he seized the Wild Ass's Skin, exclaiming—"I am a perfect fool!"

He rushed out of the house and across the garden, and flung the talisman down a well.

"*Vogue la galère,*" cried he. "The devil take all this nonsense."

So Raphael gave himself up to the happiness of being beloved, and led with Pauline the life of heart and heart. Difficulties which it would be somewhat tedious to describe had delayed their marriage, which was to take place early in March. Each was sure of the other; their affection had

been tried, and happiness had taught them how strong it was. Never has love made two souls, two natures, so absolutely one. The more they came to know of each other, the more they loved. On either side there was the same hesitating delicacy, the same transports of joy such as angels know; there were no clouds in their heaven; the will of either was the other's law.

Wealthy as they both were, they had not a caprice which they could not gratify, and for that reason had no caprices. A refined taste, a feeling for beauty and poetry, was instinct in the soul of the bride; her lover's smile was more to her than all the pearls of Ormuz. She disdained feminine finery; a muslin dress and flowers formed her most elaborate toilet.

Pauline and Raphael shunned every one else, for solitude was abundantly beautiful to them. The idlers at the Opera, or at the Italiens, saw this charming and unconventional pair evening after evening. Some gossip went the round of the salons at first, but the harmless lovers were soon forgotten in the course of events which took place in Paris; their marriage was announced at length to excuse them in the eyes of the prudish; and as it happened, their servants did not babble; so their bliss did not draw down upon them any very severe punishment.

One morning toward the end of February, at the time when the brightening days bring a belief in the nearness of the joys of spring, Pauline and Raphael were breakfasting together in a small conservatory, a kind of a drawing-room filled with flowers, on a level with the garden. The mild rays of the pale winter sunlight, breaking through the thicket of exotic plants, warmed the air somewhat. The vivid contrast made by the varieties of foliage, the colors of the masses of flowering shrubs, the freaks of light and shadow, gladdened the eyes. While all the rest of Paris still sought warmth from its melancholy hearth, these two were laughing in a bower of camellias, lilacs, and blossoming heath. Their happy faces rose above lilies of the val-

ley, narcissus blooms, and Bengal roses. A mat of plaited African grass, variegated like a carpet, lay beneath their feet in this luxurious conservatory. The walls, covered with a green linen material, bore no traces of damp. The surfaces of the rustic wooden furniture shone with cleanliness. A kitten, attracted by the odor of milk, had established itself upon the table; it allowed Pauline to bedabble it in coffee; she was playing merrily with it, taking away the cream that she had just allowed the kitten to sniff at, so as to exercise its patience, and keep up the contest. She burst out laughing at every antic, and by the comical remarks she constantly made she hindered Raphael from perusing the paper; he had dropped it a dozen times already. This morning picture seemed to overflow with inexpressible gladness, like everything that is natural and genuine.

Raphael, still pretending to read his paper, furtively watched Pauline with the cat—his Pauline, in the dressing-gown that hung carelessly about her; his Pauline, with her hair loose on her shoulders, with a tiny, white, blue-veined foot peeping out of a velvet slipper. It was pleasant to see her in this negligent dress; she was delightful as some fanciful picture by Westall; half-girl, half-woman, as she seemed to be, or perhaps more of a girl than a woman, there was no alloy in the happiness she enjoyed, and of love she knew as yet only its first ecstasy. When Raphael, absorbed in happy musing, had forgotten the existence of the newspaper, Pauline flew upon it, crumpled it up into a ball, and threw it out into the garden; the kitten sprang after the rotating object, which spun round and round, as politics are wont to do. This childish scene recalled Raphael to himself. He would have gone on reading, and felt for the sheet that he no longer possessed. Joyous laughter rang out like the song of a bird, one peal leading to another.

"I am quite jealous of the paper," she said, as she wiped away the tears that her childlike merriment had brought into her eyes. "Now, is it not a heinous offence," she went on, as she became a woman all at once, "to read Russian procla-

mations in my presence, and to attend to the prosings of the Emperor Nicholas rather than to looks and words of love!"

"I was not reading, my dear angel; I was looking at you."

Just then the gravel walk outside the conservatory rang with the sound of the gardener's heavily nailed boots.

"I beg your pardon, my Lord Marquis—and yours, too, madame—if I am intruding, but I have brought you a curiosity the like of which I never set eyes on. Drawing a bucket of water just now, with due respect, I got out this strange salt-water plant. Here it is. It must be thoroughly used to water, anyhow, for it isn't saturated or even damp at all. It is as dry as a piece of wood, and has not swelled a bit As my Lord Marquis certainly knows a great deal more about things than I do, I thought I ought to bring it, and that it would interest him."

Therewith the gardener showed Raphael the inexorable piece of skin; there were barely six square inches of it left.

"Thanks, Vanière," Raphael said. "The thing is very curious."

"What is the matter with you, my angel; you are growing quite white!" Pauline cried.

"You can go, Vanière."

"Your voice frightens me," the girl went on; "it is so strangely altered. What is it? How are you feeling? Where is the pain? You are in pain!—Jonathan! here! call a doctor!" she cried.

"Hush, my Pauline," Raphael answered, as he regained composure. "Let us get up and go. Some flower here has a scent that is too much for me. It is that verbena, perhaps."

Pauline flew upon the innocent plant, seized it by the stalk, and flung it out into the garden; then with all the might of the love between them, she clasped Raphael in a close embrace, and with languishing coquetry raised her red lips to his for a kiss.

"Dear angel," she cried, "when I saw you turn so white,

I understood that I could not live on without you; your life is my life too. Lay your hand on my back, Raphael mine; I feel a chill like death. The feeling of cold is there yet. Your lips are burning. How is your hand?—Cold as ice," she added.

"Mad girl!" exclaimed Raphael.

"Why that tear? Let me drink it."

"Oh, Pauline, Pauline, you love me far too much!"

"There is something very extraordinary going on in your mind, Raphael! Do not dissimulate. I shall very soon find out your secret. Give that to me," she went on, taking the Wild Ass's Skin.

"You are my executioner!" the young man exclaimed, glancing in horror at the talisman.

"How changed your voice is!" cried Pauline, as she dropped the fatal symbol of destiny.

"Do you love me?" he asked.

"Do I love you? Is there any doubt?"

"Then leave me; go away!"

The poor child went.

"So!" cried Raphael, when he was alone. "In an enlightened age, when we have found out that diamonds are a crystallized form of charcoal, at a time when everything is made clear, when the police would hale a new Messiah before the magistrates, and submit his miracles to the Académie des Sciences—in an epoch when we no longer believe in anything but a notary's signature—that I, forsooth, should believe in a sort of *Mene, Tekel, Upharsin!* No, by Heaven, I will not believe that the Supreme Being would take pleasure in torturing a harmless creature.—Let us see the learned about it."

Between the Halle des Vins, with its extensive assembly of barrels, and the Salpétrière, that extensive seminary of drunkenness, lies a small pond, which Raphael soon reached. All sorts of ducks of rare varieties were there disporting themselves; their colored markings shone in the sun like the glass in cathedral windows. Every kind of duck in the

world was represented, quacking, dabbling, and moving about—a kind of parliament of ducks assembled against its will, but luckily without either charter or political principles, living in complete immunity from sportsmen, under the eyes of any naturalist that chanced to see them.

"That is M. Lavrille," said one of the keepers to Raphael, who had asked for that high priest of zoölogy.

The marquis saw a short man buried in profound reflections, caused by the appearance of a pair of ducks. The man of science was middle-aged; he had a pleasant face, made pleasanter still by a kindly expression, but an absorption in scientific ideas engrossed his whole person. His peruke was strangely turned up, by being constantly raised to scratch his head; so that a line of white hair was left plainly visible, a witness to an enthusiasm for investigation, which, like every other strong passion, so withdraws us from mundane considerations that we lose all consciousness of the "I" within us. Raphael, the student and man of science, looked respectfully at the naturalist, who devoted his nights to enlarging the limits of human knowledge, and whose very errors reflected glory upon France; but a she-coxcomb would have laughed, no doubt, at the break in continuity between the breeches and striped waistcoat worn by the man of learning; the interval, moreover, was modestly filled by a shirt which had been considerably creased, for he stooped and raised himself by turns, as his zoölogical observations required.

After the first interchange of civilities, Raphael thought it necessary to pay M. Lavrille a banal compliment upon his ducks.

"Oh, we are well off for ducks," the naturalist replied. "The genus, moreover, as you doubtless know, is the most prolific in the order of palmipeds. It begins with the swan and ends with the *zin-zin* duck, comprising in all one hundred and thirty-seven very distinct varieties, each having its own name, habits, country, and character, and every one no more like another than a white man is like a negro. Really,

sir, when we dine off a duck, we have no notion for the most part of the vast extent—"

He interrupted himself as he saw a small pretty duck come up to the surface of the pond.

"There you see the cravatted swan, a poor native of Canada; he has come a very long way to show us his brown and gray plumage and his little black cravat! Look, he is preening himself. That one is the famous eider duck that provides the down, the eider-down under which our fine ladies sleep; isn't it pretty? Who would not admire the little pinkish-white breast and the green beak? I have just been a witness, sir," he went on, "to a marriage that I had long despaired of bringing about; they have paired rather auspiciously, and I shall await the results very eagerly. This will be a hundred and thirty-eighth species, I flatter myself, to which, perhaps, my name will be given. That is the newly mated pair," he said, pointing out two of the ducks; "one of them is a laughing goose (*anas albifrons*), and the other the great whistling duck, Buffon's *anas ruffina*. I have hesitated a long while between the whistling duck, the duck with white eyebrows, and the shoveller duck (*anas clypeata*). Stay, that is the shoveller—that fat, brownish black rascal, with the greenish neck and that coquettish iridescence on it. But the whistling duck was a crested one, sir, and you will understand that I deliberated no longer. We only lack the variegated black-capped duck now. These gentlemen here unanimously claim that that variety of duck is only a repetition of the curve-beaked teal, but for my own part"—and the gesture he made was worth seeing. It expressed at once the modesty and pride of a man of science; the pride full of obstinacy, and the modesty well tempered with assurance.

"I don't think it is," he added. "You see, my dear sir, that we are not amusing ourselves here. I am engaged at this moment upon a monograph on the genus duck. But I am at your disposal."

While they went toward a rather pleasant house in the

Rue de Buffon, Raphael submitted the skin to M. Lavrille's inspection.

"I know the product," said the man of science, when he had turned his magnifying glass upon the talisman. "It used to be used for covering boxes. The shagreen is very old. They prefer to use skate's skin nowadays for making sheaths. This, as you are doubtless aware, is the hide of the *raja sephen*, a Red Sea fish."

"But this, sir, since you are so exceedingly good—"

"This," the man of science interrupted, as he resumed, "this is quite another thing; between these two shagreens, sir, there is a difference just as wide as between sea and land, or fish and flesh. The fish's skin is harder, however, than the skin of the land animal. This," he said, as he indicated the talisman, "is, as you doubtless know, one of the most curious of zoölogical products."

"But to proceed—" said Raphael.

"This," replied the man of science, as he flung himself down into his armchair, "is an ass's skin, sir."

"Yes, I know," said the young man.

"A very rare variety of ass is found in Persia," the naturalist continued, "the onager of the ancients, *equus asinus*, the *koulan* of the Tartars; Pallas went out there to observe it, and has made it known to science, for as a matter of fact the animal for a long time was believed to be mythical. It is mentioned, as you know, in Holy Scripture; Moses forbade that it should be coupled with its own species, and the onager is yet more famous for the prostitutions of which it was the object, and which are often mentioned by the prophets of the Bible. Pallas, as you know doubtless, states in his 'Act. Petrop.' tome II., that these bizarre excesses are still devoutly believed in among the Persians and the Nogais as a sovereign remedy for lumbago and sciatic gout. We poor Parisians scarcely believe that. The Museum has no example of the onager.

"What a magnificent animal!" he continued. "It is full of mystery; its eyes are provided with a sort of burnished

covering, to which the Orientals attribute the powers of fascination; it has a glossier and finer coat than our handsomest horses possess, striped with more or less tawny bands, very much like the zebra's hide. There is something pliant and silky about its hair, which is sleek to the touch. Its powers of sight vie in precision and accuracy with those of man; it is rather larger than our largest domestic donkeys, and is possessed of extraordinary courage. If it is surprised by any chance, it defends itself against the most dangerous wild beasts with remarkable success; the rapidity of its movements can only be compared with the flight of birds; an onager, sir, would run the best Arab or Persian horses to death. According to the father of the conscientious Doctor Niebuhr, whose recent loss we are deploring, as you doubtless know, the ordinary average pace of one of these wonderful creatures would be seven thousand geometic feet per hour. Our own degenerate race of donkeys can give no idea of the ass in his pride and independence. He is active and spirited in his demeanor; he is cunning and sagacious; there is grace about the outlines of his head; every movement is full of attractive charm. In the East he is the king of beasts. Turkish and Persian superstition even credits him with a mysterious origin; and when stories of the prowess attributed to him are told in Thibet or in Tartary, the speakers mingle Solomon's name with that of this noble animal. A tame onager, in short, is worth an enormous amount; it is wellnigh impossible to catch them among the mountains, where they leap like roebucks, and seem as if they could fly like birds. Our myth of the winged horse, our Pegasus, had its origin doubtless in these countries, where the shepherds could see the onager springing from one rock to another. In Persia they breed asses for the saddle, a cross between a tamed onager and a she-ass, and they paint them red, following immemorial tradition. Perhaps it was this custom that gave rise to our own proverb, 'Surly as a red donkey.' At some period when natural history was much neglected in France, I think a traveller must have brought

over one of these strange beasts that endures servitude with such impatience. Hence the adage. The skin that you have laid before me is the skin of an onager. Opinions differ as to the origin of the name. Some claim that *Chagri* is a Turkish word; others insist that *Chagri* must be the name of the place where this animal product underwent the chemical process of preparation so clearly described by Pallas, to which the peculiar graining that we admire is due; Martellens has written to me saying that *Châagri* is a river—"

"I thank you, sir, for the information that you have given me; it would furnish an admirable footnote for some Dom Calmet or other, if such erudite hermits yet exist; but I have had the honor of pointing out to you that this scrap was in the first instance quite as large as that map," said Raphael, indicating an open atlas to Lavrille; "but it has shrunk visibly in three months' time—"

"Quite so," said the man of science; "I understand. The remains of any substance primarily organic are naturally subject to a process of decay. It is quite easy to understand, and its progress depends upon atmospherical conditions. Even metals contract and expand appreciably, for engineers have remarked somewhat considerable interstices between great blocks of stone originally clamped together with iron bars. The field of science is boundless, but human life is very short, so that we do not claim to be acquainted with all the phenomena of nature."

"Pardon the question that I am about to ask you, sir," Raphael began, half embarrassed, "but are you quite sure that this piece of skin is subject to the ordinary laws of zoölogy, and that it can be stretched?"

"Certainly—oh, bother!—" muttered M. Lavrille, trying to stretch the talisman. "But if you, sir, will go to see Planchette," he added, "the celebrated professor of mechanics, he will certainly discover some method of acting upon this skin, of softening and expanding it."

"Ah, sir, you are the preserver of my life," and Raphael took leave of the learned naturalist and hurried off to

Planchette, leaving the worthy Lavrille in his study, all among the bottles and dried plants that filled it up.

Quite unconsciously Raphael brought away with him from this visit all of science that man can grasp, a terminology to wit. Lavrille, the worthy man, was very much like Sancho Panza giving to Don Quixote the history of the goats; he was entertaining himself by making out a list of animals and ticking them off. Even now that his life was nearing its end, he was scarcely acquainted with a mere fraction of the countless numbers of the great tribes that God has scattered, for some unknown end, throughout the ocean of worlds.

Raphael was well pleased. "I shall keep my ass well in hand," cried he. Sterne had said before his day, "Let us take care of our ass, if we wish to live to old age." But it is such a fantastic brute!

Planchette was a tall, thin man, a poet of a surety, lost in one continual thought, and always employed in gazing into the bottomless abyss of Motion. Commonplace minds accuse these lofty intellects of madness; they form a misinterpreted race apart that lives in a wonderful carelessness of luxuries or other people's notions. They will spend whole days at a stretch smoking a cigar that has gone out, and enter a drawing-room with the buttons on their garments not in every case formally wedded to the buttonholes. Some day or other, after a long time spent in measuring space, or in accumulating X's under Aa-Gg, they succeed in analyzing some natural law, and resolve it into its elemental principles, and all on a sudden the crowd gapes at a new machine; or it is a handcart perhaps that overwhelms us with astonishment by the apt simplicity of its construction. The modest man of science smiles at his admirers, and remarks, "What is that invention of mine? Nothing whatever. Man cannot create a force; he can but direct it; and science consists in learning from nature."

The mechanician was standing bolt upright, planted on both feet, like some victim dropped straight from the gibbet,

when Raphael broke in upon him. He was intently watching an agate ball that rolled over a sundial, and awaited its final settlement. The worthy man had received neither pension nor decoration; he had not known how to make the right use of his ability for calculation. He was happy in his life spent on the watch for a discovery; he had no thought either of reputation, of the outer world, nor even of himself, and led the life of science for the sake of science.

"It is inexplicable," he exclaimed. "Ah, your servant, sir," he went on, becoming aware of Raphael's existence. "How is your mother? You must go and see my wife."

"And I also could have lived thus," thought Raphael, as he recalled the learned man from his meditations by asking of him how to produce any effect on the talisman, which he placed before him.

"Although my credulity must amuse you, sir," so the marquis ended, "I will conceal nothing from you. That skin seems to me to be endowed with an insuperable power of resistance."

"People of fashion, sir, always treat science rather superciliously," said Planchette. "They all talk to us pretty much as the *incroyable* did when he brought some ladies to see Lalande just after an eclipse, and remarked, 'Be so good as to begin it over again!' What effect do you want to produce? The object of the science of mechanics is either the application or the neutralization of the laws of motion. As for motion pure and simple, I tell you humbly that we cannot possibly define it. That disposed of, unvarying phenomena have been observed which accompany the actions of solids and fluids. If we set up the conditions by which these phenomena are brought to pass, we can transport bodies or communicate locomotive power to them at a predetermined rate of speed. We can project them, divide them up in a few or an infinite number of pieces, accordingly as we break them or grind them to powder; we can twist bodies or make them rotate, modify, compress, expand, or extend them. The whole science, sir, rests upon a single fact.

"You see this ball," he went on. "It lies upon this slab. Now, it is over there. What name shall we give to what has taken place, so natural from a physical point of view, so amazing from a moral? Movement, locomotion, changing of place? What prodigious vanity lurks underneath the words. Does a name solve the difficulty? Yet it is the whole of our science for all that. Our machines either make direct use of this agency, this fact, or they convert it. This trifling phenomenon, applied to large masses, would send Paris flying. We can increase speed by an expenditure of force, and augment the force by an increase of speed. But what are speed and force? Our science is as powerless to tell us that as to create motion. Any movement whatever is an immense power, and man does not create power of any kind. Everything is movement, thought itself is a movement, upon movement nature is based. Death is a movement whose limitations are little known. If God is eternal, be sure that He moves perpetually; perhaps God is movement. That is why movement, like God, is inexplicable, unfathomable, unlimited, incomprehensible, intangible. Who has ever touched, comprehended, or measured movement? We feel its effects without seeing it; we can even deny them as we can deny the existence of a God. Where is it? Where is it not? Whence comes it? What is its source? What is its end? It surrounds us, it intrudes upon us, and yet escapes us. It is evident as a fact, obscure as an abstraction; it is at once effect and cause. It requires space, even as we, and what is space? Movement alone recalls it to us; without movement, space is but an empty meaningless word. Like space, like creation, like the infinite, movement is an insoluble problem which confounds human reason; man will never conceive it, whatever else he may be permitted to conceive.

"Between each point in space occupied in succession by that ball," continued the man of science, "there is an abyss confronting human reason, an abyss into which Pascal fell. In order to produce any effect upon an unknown substance, we ought first of all to study that substance; to know

whether, in accordance with its nature, it will be broken by the force of a blow, or whether it will withstand it; if it breaks in pieces, and you have no wish to split it up, we shall not achieve the end proposed. If you want to compress it, a uniform impulse must be communicated to all the particles of the substance, so as to diminish the interval that separates them in an equal degree. If you wish to expand it, we should try to bring a uniform excentric force to bear on every molecule; for unless we conform accurately to this law we shall have breaches in continuity. The modes of motion, sir, are infinite, and no limit exists to combinations of movement. Upon what effect have you determined?"

"I want any kind of pressure that is strong enough to expand the skin indefinitely," began Raphael, quite out of patience.

"Substance is finite," the mathematician put in, "and therefore will not admit of indefinite expansion, but pressure will necessarily increase the extent of surface at the expense of the thickness, which will be diminished until the point is reached when the material gives out—"

"Bring about that result, sir," Raphael cried, "and you will have earned millions."

"Then I should rob you of your money," replied the other, phlegmatic as a Dutchman. "I am going to show you, in a word or two, that a machine can be made that is fit to crush Providence itself in pieces like a fly. It would reduce a man to the condition of a piece of wastepaper; a man—boots and spurs, hat and cravat, trinkets and gold, and all—"

"What a fearful machine!"

"Instead of flinging their brats into the water, the Chinese ought to make them useful in this way," the man of science went on, without reflecting on the regard man has for his progeny.

Quite absorbed by his idea, Planchette took an empty flower-pot, with a hole in the bottom, and put it on the surface of the dial, then he went to look for a little clay in

a corner of the garden. Raphael stood spellbound, like a child to whom his nurse is telling some wonderful story. Planchette put the clay down upon the slab, drew a pruning-knife from his pocket, cut two branches from an elder tree, and began to clear them of pith by blowing through them, as if Raphael had not been present.

"There are the rudiments of the apparatus," he said. Then he connected one of the wooden pipes with the bottom of the flower-pot by a clay joint, in such a way that the mouth of the elder stem was just under the hole of the flower-pot; you might have compared it to a big tobacco-pipe. He spread a bed of clay over the surface of the slab, in a shovel-shaped mass, set down the flower-pot at the wider end of it, and laid the pipe of elder stem along the portion which represented the handle of the shovel. Next he put a lump of clay at the end of the elder stem and therein planted the other pipe, in an upright position, forming a second elbow which connected it with the first horizontal pipe in such a manner that the air, or any given fluid in circulation, could flow through this improvised piece of mechanism from the mouth of the vertical tube, along the intermediate passages, and so into the large empty flower-pot.

"This apparatus, sir," he said to Raphael, with all the gravity of an academician pronouncing his initiatory discourse, "is one of the great Pascal's grandest claims upon our admiration."

"I don't understand."

The man of science smiled. He went up to a fruit tree and took down a little phial in which the druggist had sent him some liquid for catching ants; he broke off the bottom and made a funnel of the top, carefully fitting it to the mouth of the vertical hollowed stem that he had set in the clay, and at the opposite end to the great reservoir, represented by the flower-pot. Next, by means of a watering-pot, he poured in sufficient water to rise to the same level in the large vessel and in the tiny circular funnel at the end of the elder stem.

Raphael was thinking of his piece of skin.

"Water is considered to-day, sir, to be an incompressible body," said the mechanician; "never lose sight of that fundamental principle; still it can be compressed, though only so very slightly that we should regard its faculty for contracting as a zero. You see the amount of surface presented by the water at the brim of the flower-pot?"

"Yes, sir."

"Very good; now suppose that that surface is a thousand times larger than the orifice of the elder stem through which I poured the liquid. Here, I am taking the funnel away—"

"Granted."

"Well, then, if by any method whatever I increase the volume of that quantity of water by pouring in yet more through the mouth of the little tube, the water thus compelled to flow downward would rise in the reservoir, represented by the flower-pot, until it reached the same level at either end."

"That is quite clear," cried Raphael.

"But there is this difference," the other went on. "Suppose that the thin column of water poured into the little vertical tube there exerts a force equal, say, to a pound weight, for instance, its action will be punctually communicated to the great body of the liquid, and will be transmitted to every part of the surface represented by the water in the flower-pot, so that at the surface there will be a thousand columns of water, every one pressing upward as if they were impelled by a force equal to that which compels the liquid to descend in the vertical tube; and of necessity they reproduce here," said Planchette, indicating to Raphael the top of the flower-pot, "the force introduced over there, a thousand-fold," and the man of science pointed out to the Marquis the upright wooden pipe set in the clay.

"That is quite simple," said Raphael.

Planchette smiled again.

"In other words," he went on, with the mathematician's natural stubborn propensity for logic, "in order to resist the

force of the incoming water it would be necessary to exert, upon every part of the large surface, a force equal to that brought into action in the vertical column, but with this difference—if the column of liquid is a foot in height, the thousand little columns of the wide surface will only have a very slight elevating power.

"Now," said Planchette, as he gave a fillip to his bits of stick, "let us replace this funny little apparatus by steel tubes of suitable strength and dimensions; and if you cover the liquid surface of the reservoir with a strong sliding plate of metal, and if to this metal plate you oppose another, solid enough and strong enough to resist any test; if, furthermore, you give me the power of continually adding water to the volume of liquid contents by means of the little vertical tube, the object fixed between the two solid metal plates must of necessity yield to the tremendous crushing force which indefinitely compresses it. The method of continually pouring in water through a little tube, like the manner of communicating force through the volume of the liquid to a metal plate, is an absurdly primitive mechanical device. A brace of pistons and a few valves would do it all. Do you perceive, my dear sir," he said, taking Valentin by the arm, "there is scarcely a substance in existence that would not be compelled to dilate when fixed in between these two indefinitely resisting surfaces?"

"What! the author of the 'Lettres provinciales' invented it?" Raphael exclaimed.

"He and no other, sir. The science of mechanics knows no simpler nor more beautiful contrivance. The opposite principle, the capacity of expansion possessed by water, has brought the steam-engine into being. But water will only expand up to a certain point, while its incompressibility, being a force in a manner negative, is, of necessity, infinite."

"If this skin is expanded," said Raphael, "I promise you to erect a colossal statue to Blaise Pascal; to found a prize of a hundred thousand francs to be offered every ten

years for the solution of the grandest problem of mechanical science effected during the interval; to find dowries for all your cousins and second cousins, and finally to build an asylum on purpose for impoverished or insane mathematicians."

"That would be exceedingly useful," Planchette replied. "We will go to Spieghalter to-morrow, sir," he continued, with the serenity of a man living on a plane wholly intellectual. "That distinguished mechanic has just completed, after my own designs, an improved mechanical arrangement by which a child could get a thousand trusses of hay inside his cap."

"Then good-by till to-morrow."

"Till to-morrow, sir."

"Talk of mechanics!" cried Raphael; "isn't it the greatest of the sciences? The other fellow with his onagers, classifications, ducks, and species, and his phials full of bottled monstrosities, is at best only fit for a billiard-marker in a saloon."

The next morning Raphael went off in great spirits to find Planchette, and together they set out for the Rue de la Santé—auspicious appellation! Arrived at Spieghalter's, the young man found himself in a vast foundry; his eyes lighted upon a multitude of glowing and roaring furnaces. There was a storm of sparks, a deluge of nails, an ocean of pistons, vises, levers, valves, girders, files, and nuts; a sea of melted metal, balks of timber and bar-steel. Iron filings filled your throat. There was iron in the atmosphere; the men were covered with it; everything reeked of iron. The iron seemed to be a living organism; it became a fluid, moved, and seemed to shape itself intelligently after every fashion, to obey the worker's every caprice. Through the uproar made by the bellows, the crescendo of the falling hammers, and the shrill sounds of the lathes that drew groans from the steel, Raphael passed into a large, clean, and airy place where he was able to inspect at his leisure the great press that Planchette had told him about. He

admired the cast-iron beams, as one might call them, and the twin bars of steel coupled together with indestructible bolts.

"If you were to give seven rapid turns to that crank," said Spieghalter, pointing out a beam of polished steel, "you would make a steel bar spurt out in thousands of jets that would get into your legs like needles."

"The deuce!" exclaimed Raphael.

Planchette himself slipped the piece of skin between the metal plates of the all-powerful press; and, brimful of the certainty of a scientific conviction, he worked the crank energetically.

"Lie flat, all of you; we are dead men!" thundered Spieghalter, as he himself fell prone on the floor.

A hideous shrieking sound rang through the workshops. The water in the machine had broken the chamber, and now spouted out in a jet of incalculable force; luckily it went in the direction of an old furnace, which was overthrown, knocked to pieces, and twisted like a house that has been enveloped and carried away by a waterspout.

"Ha!" remarked Planchette serenely, "the piece of skin is as safe and sound as my eye. There was a flaw in your reservoir somewhere, or a crevice in the large tube—"

"No, no; I know my reservoir. The devil is in your contrivance, sir; you can take it away," and the German pounced upon a smith's hammer, flung the skin down on an anvil, and, with all the strength that rage gives, dealt the talisman the most formidable blow that had ever resounded through his workshops.

"There is not so much as a mark on it!" said Planchette, stroking the perverse bit of skin.

The workmen hurried in. The foreman took the skin and buried it in the glowing coal of a forge, while, in a semicircle round the fire, they all awaited the action of a huge pair of bellows. Raphael, Spieghalter, and Professor Planchette stood in the midst of the grimy expectant crowd. Raphael, looking round on faces dusted over with iron filings,

white eyes, greasy blackened clothing, and hairy chests, could have fancied himself transported into the wild nocturnal world of German ballad poetry. After the skin had been in the fire for ten minutes, the foreman pulled it out with a pair of pincers.

"Hand it over to me," said Raphael.

The foreman held it out by way of a joke. The marquis readily handled it; it was cool and flexible between his fingers. An exclamation of alarm went up; the workmen fled in terror. Valentin was left alone with Planchette in the empty workshop.

"There is certainly something infernal in the thing!" cried Raphael, in desperation. "Is no human power able to give me one day more of existence?"

"I made a mistake, sir," said the mathematician, with a penitent expression; "we ought to have subjected that peculiar skin to the action of a rolling machine. Where could my eyes have been when I suggested compression!"

"It was I that asked for it," Raphael answered.

The mathematician heaved a sigh of relief, like a culprit acquitted by a dozen jurors. Still, the strange problem afforded by the skin interested him; he meditated a moment, and then remarked—

"This unknown material ought to be treated chemically by re-agents. Let us call on Japhet—perhaps the chemist may have better luck than the mechanic."

Valentin urged his horse into a rapid trot, hoping to find the chemist, the celebrated Japhet, in his laboratory.

"Well, old friend," Planchette began, seeing Japhet in his armchair, examining a precipitate; "how goes chemistry?"

"Gone to sleep. Nothing new at all. The Académie, however, has recognized the existence of salicine, but salicine, asparagine, vauqueline, and digitaline are not really discoveries—"

"Since you cannot invent substances," said Raphael, "you are obliged to fall back on inventing names."

"Most emphatically true, young man."

"Here," said Planchette, addressing the chemist, "try to analyze this composition; if you can extract any element whatever from it, I christen it *diaboline* beforehand, for we have just smashed a hydraulic press in trying to compress it."

"Let's see! let's have a look at it!" cried the delighted chemist; "it may, perhaps, be a fresh element."

"It is simply a piece of the skin of an ass, sir," said Raphael.

"Sir!" said the illustrious chemist sternly.

"I am not joking," the marquis answered, laying the piece of skin before him.

Baron Japhet applied the nervous fibres of his tongue to the skin; he had skill in thus detecting salts, acids, alkalies and gases. After several experiments, he remarked—

"No taste whatever! Come, we will give it a little fluoric acid to drink."

Subjected to the influence of this ready solvent of animal tissue, the skin underwent no change whatsoever.

"It is not shagreen at all!" the chemist cried. "We will treat this unknown mystery as a mineral, and try its mettle by dropping it in a crucible where I have at this moment some red potash."

Japhet went out, and returned almost immediately.

"Allow me to cut away a bit of this strange substance, sir," he said to Raphael; "it is so extraordinary—"

"A bit!" exclaimed Raphael; "not so much as a hair-breadth. You may try, though," he added, half banteringly, half sadly.

The chemist broke a razor in his desire to cut the skin; he tried to break it by a powerful electric shock; next he submitted it to the influence of a galvanic battery; but all the thunderbolts his science wotted of fell harmless on the dreadful talisman.

It was seven o'clock in the evening. Planchette, Japhet, and Raphael, unaware of the flight of time, were awaiting

the outcome of a final experiment. The Wild Ass's Skin emerged triumphant from a formidable encounter in which it had been engaged with a considerable quantity of chloride of nitrogen.

"It is all over with me," Raphael wailed. "It is the finger of God! I shall die!—" and he left the two amazed scientific men.

"We must be very careful not to talk about this affair at the Académie; our colleagues there would laugh at us," Planchette remarked to the chemist, after a long pause, in which they looked at each other without daring to communicate their thoughts. The learned pair looked like two Christians who had issued from their tombs to find no God in the heavens. Science had been powerless; acids, so much clear water; red potash had been discredited; the galvanic battery and electric shock had been a couple of playthings.

"A hydraulic press broken like a biscuit!" commented Planchette.

"I believe in the devil," said the Baron Japhet, after a moment's silence.

"And I in God," replied Planchette.

Each spoke in character. The universe for a mechanician is a machine that requires an operator; for chemistry—that fiendish employment of decomposing all things—the world is a gas endowed with the power of movement.

"We cannot deny the fact," the chemist replied.

"Pshaw! those gentlemen the doctrinaires have invented a nebulous aphorism for our consolation—Stupid as a fact."

"Your aphorism," said the chemist, "seems to me as a fact very stupid."

They began to laugh, and went off to dine like folk for whom a miracle is nothing more than a phenomenon.

Valentin reached his own house shivering with rage and consumed with anger. He had no more faith in anything. Conflicting thoughts shifted and surged to and fro in his brain, as is the case with every man brought face to face

with an inconceivable fact. He had readily believed in some hidden flaw in Spieghalter's apparatus; he had not been surprised by the incompetence and failure of science and of fire; but the flexibility of the skin as he handled it, taken with its stubbornness when all the means of destruction that man possesses had been brought to bear upon it in vain—these things terrified him. The incontrovertible fact made him dizzy.

"I am mad," he muttered. "I have had no food since the morning, and yet I am neither hungry nor thirsty, and there is a fire in my breast that burns me."

He put back the skin in the frame where it had been inclosed but lately, drew a line in red ink about the actual configuration of the talisman, and seated himself in his armchair.

"Eight o'clock already!" he exclaimed. "To-day has gone like a dream."

He leaned his elbow on the arm of the chair, propped his head with his left hand, and so remained, lost in secret dark reflections and consuming thoughts that men condemned to die bear away with them.

"Oh, Pauline!" he cried. "Poor child! there are gulfs that Love can never traverse, despite the strength of his wings."

Just then he very distinctly heard a smothered sigh, and knew by one of the most tender privileges of passionate love that it was Pauline's breathing.

"That is my death warrant," he said to himself. "If she were there, I should wish to die in her arms."

A burst of gleeful and hearty laughter made him turn his face toward the bed; he saw Pauline's face through the transparent curtains, smiling like a child for gladness over a successful piece of mischief. Her pretty hair fell over her shoulders in countless curls; she looked like a Bengal rose upon a pile of white roses.

"I cajoled Jonathan," said she. "Doesn't the bed belong to me, to me who am your wife? Don't scold me, darling;

I only wanted to surprise you, to sleep beside you. Forgive me for my freak."

She sprang out of bed like a kitten, showed herself gleaming in her lawn raiment, and sat down on Raphael's knee.

"Love, what gulf were you talking about?" she said, with an anxious expression apparent upon her face.

"Death."

"You hurt me," she answered. "There are some thoughts upon which we, poor women that we are, cannot dwell; they are death to us. Is it strength of love in us, or lack of courage? I cannot tell. Death does not frighten me," she began again, laughingly. "To die with you, both together, tomorrow morning, in one last embrace, would be joy. It seems to me that even then I should have lived more than a hundred years. What does the number of days matter if we have spent a whole lifetime of peace and love in one night, in one hour?"

"You are right; Heaven is speaking through that pretty mouth of yours. Grant that I may kiss you, and let us die," said Raphael.

"Then let us die," she said, laughing.

Toward nine o'clock in the morning the daylight streamed through the chinks of the window shutters. Obscured somewhat by the muslin curtains, it yet sufficed to show clearly the rich colors of the carpet, the silks and furniture of the room, where the two lovers were lying asleep. The gilding sparkled here and there. A ray of sunlight fell and faded upon the soft down quilt that the freaks of love had thrown to the ground. The outlines of Pauline's dress, hanging from a cheval glass, appeared like a shadowy ghost. Her dainty shoes had been left at a distance from the bed. A nightingale came to perch upon the sill; its trills repeated over again, and the sounds of its wings suddenly shaken out for flight, awoke Raphael.

"For me to die," he said, following out a thought begun in his dream, "my organization, the mechanism of flesh and bone, that is quickened by the will in me, and makes of me

an individual *man*, must display some perceptible disease. Doctors ought to understand the symptoms of any attack on vitality, and could tell me whether I am sick or sound."

He gazed at his sleeping wife. She had stretched her head out to him, expressing in this way even while she slept the anxious tenderness of love. Pauline seemed to look at him as she lay with her face turned toward him in an attitude as full of grace as a young child's, with her pretty, half-opened mouth held out toward him, as she drew her light, even breath. Her little pearly teeth seemed to heighten the redness of the fresh lips with the smile hovering over them. The red glow in her complexion was brighter, and its whiteness was, so to speak, whiter still just then than in the most impassioned moments of the waking day. In her unconstrained grace, as she lay, so full of believing trust, the adorable attractions of childhood were added to the enchantments of love.

Even the most unaffected women still obey certain social conventions, which restrain the free expansion of the soul within them during their waking hours; but slumber seems to give them back the spontaneity of life which makes infancy lovely. Pauline blushed for nothing; she was like one of those beloved and heavenly beings, in whom reason has not yet put motives into their actions and mystery into their glances. Her profile stood out in sharp relief against the fine cambric of the pillows; there was a certain sprightliness about her loose hair in confusion, mingled with the deep lace ruffles; but she was sleeping in happiness, her long lashes were tightly pressed against her cheeks, as if to secure her eyes from too strong a light, or to aid an effort of her soul to recollect and to hold fast a bliss that had been perfect but fleeting. Her tiny pink and white ear, framed by a lock of her hair and outlined by a wrapping of Mechlin lace, would have made an artist, a painter, an old man, wildly in love, and would perhaps have restored a madman to his senses.

Is it not an ineffable bliss to behold the woman that you

love, sleeping, smiling, in a peaceful dream beneath your protection, loving you even in dreams, even at the point where the individual seems to cease to exist, offering to you yet the mute lips that speak to you in slumber of the latest kiss? Is it not indescribable happiness to see a trusting woman, half-clad, but wrapped round in her love as by a cloak—modesty in the midst of dishevelment—to see admiringly her scattered clothing, the silken stocking hastily put off to please you last evening, the unclasped girdle that implies a boundless faith in you. A whole romance lies there in that girdle; the woman that it used to protect exists no longer; she is yours, she has become *you;* henceforward any betrayal of her is a blow dealt at yourself.

In this softened mood Raphael's eyes wandered over the room, now filled with memories and love, and where the very daylight seemed to take delightful hues. Then he turned his gaze at last upon the outlines of the woman's form, upon youth and purity, and love that even now had no thought that was not for him alone, above all things, and longed to live forever. As his eyes fell upon Pauline, her own opened at once as if a ray of sunlight had lighted on them.

"Good-morning," she said, smiling. "How handsome you are, bad man!"

The grace of love and youth, of silence and dawn, shone in their faces, making a divine picture, with the fleeting spell over it all that belongs only to the earliest days of passion, just as simplicity and artlessness are the peculiar possession of childhood. Alas! love's springtide joys, like our own youthful laughter, must even take flight, and live for us no longer save in memory; either for our despair, or to shed some soothing fragrance over us, according to the bent of our inmost thoughts.

"What made me wake you?" said Raphael. "It was so great a pleasure to watch you sleeping that it brought tears to my eyes."

"And to mine, too," she answered. "I cried in the

night while I watched you sleeping, but not with happiness. Raphael, dear, pray listen to me. Your breathing is labored while you sleep, and something rattles in your chest that frightens me. You have a little dry cough when you are asleep, exactly like my father's, who is dying of phthisis. In those sounds from your lungs I recognized some of the peculiar symptoms of that complaint. Then you are feverish; I know you are, your hand was moist and burning—Darling, you are young," she added with a shudder, "and you could still get over it if unfortunately— But, no," she cried cheerfully, "there is no 'unfortunately,' the disease is contagious, so the doctors say."

She flung both arms about Raphael, drawing in his breath through one of those kisses in which the soul reaches its end.

"I do not wish to live to old age," she said. "Let us both die young, and go to heaven while flowers fill our hands."

"We always make such designs as those when we are well and strong," Raphael replied, burying his hands in Pauline's hair. But even then a horrible fit of coughing came on, one of those deep ominous coughs that seem to come from the depths of the tomb, a cough that leaves the sufferer ghastly pale, trembling and perspiring; with aching sides and quivering nerves, with a feeling of weariness pervading the very marrow of the spine, and unspeakable languor in every vein. Raphael slowly laid himself down, pale, exhausted, and overcome, like a man who has spent all the strength in him over one final effort. Pauline's eyes, grown large with terror, were fixed upon him; she lay quite motionless, pale, and silent.

"Let us commit no more follies, my angel," she said, trying not to let Raphael see the dreadful forebodings that disturbed her. She covered her face with her hands, for she saw Death before her—the hideous skeleton. Raphael's face had grown as pale and livid as any skull unearthed from a churchyard to assist the studies of some scientific man. Pauline remembered the exclamation that had escaped from

Valentin the previous evening, and to herself she said—"Yes, there are gulfs that love can never cross, and therein love must bury itself."

On a March morning, some days after this wretched scene, Raphael found himself seated in an armchair, placed in the window in the full light of day. Four doctors stood round him, each in turn trying his pulse, feeling him over, and questioning him with apparent interest. The invalid sought to guess their thoughts, putting a construction on every movement they made, and on the slightest contractions of their brows. His last hope lay in this consultation. This court of appeal was about to pronounce its decision—life or death.

Valentin had summoned the oracles of modern medicine, so that he might have the last word of science. Thanks to his wealth and title, there stood before him three embodied theories; human knowledge fluctuated round the three points. Three of the doctors brought among them the complete circle of medical philosophy; they represented the points of conflict round which the battle raged, between Spiritualism, Analysis, and goodness knows what in the way of mocking eclecticism.

The fourth doctor was Horace Bianchon, a man of science with a future before him, the most distinguished man of the new school in medicine, a discreet and unassuming representative of a studious generation that is preparing to receive the inheritance of fifty years of experience treasured up by the Ecole de Paris, a generation that perhaps will erect the monument for the building of which the centuries behind us have collected the different materials. As a personal friend of the marquis and of Rastignac, he had been in attendance on the former for some days past, and was helping him to answer the inquiries of the three professors, occasionally insisting somewhat upon those symptoms which, in his opinion, pointed to pulmonary disease.

"You have been living at a great pace, leading a dissipated life, no doubt, and you have devoted yourself largely

to intellectual work?" queried one of the three celebrated authorities, addressing Raphael. He was a square-headed man, with a large frame and energetic organization, which seemed to mark him out as superior to his two rivals.

"I made up my mind to kill myself with debauchery, after spending three years over an extensive work, with which perhaps you may some day occupy yourselves," Raphael replied.

The great doctor shook his head, and so displayed his satisfaction. "I was sure of it," he seemed to say to himself. He was the illustrious Brisset, the successor of Cabanis and Bichat, head of the Organic School, a doctor popular with believers in material and positive science, who see in man a complete individual, subject solely to the laws of his own particular organization; and who consider that his normal condition and abnormal states of disease can both be traced to obvious causes.

After this reply, Brisset looked, without speaking, at a middle-sized person, whose darkly flushed countenance and glowing eyes seemed to belong to some antique satyr; and who, leaning his back against the corner of the embrasure, was studying Raphael, without saying a word. Doctor Caméristus, a man of creeds and enthusiasms, the head of the "Vitalists," a romantic champion of the esoteric doctrines of Van Helmont, discerned a lofty informing principle in human life, a mysterious and inexplicable phenomenon which mocks at the scalpel, deceives the surgeon, eludes the drugs of the pharmacopœia, the formulæ of algebra, the demonstrations of anatomy, and derides all our efforts; a sort of invisible, intangible flame, which, obeying some divinely appointed law, will often linger on in a body in our opinion devoted to death, while it takes flight from an organization well fitted for prolonged existence.

A bitter smile hovered upon the lips of the third doctor, Maugredie, a man of acknowledged ability, but a Pyrrhonist and a scoffer, with the scalpel for his one article of faith. He would consider, as a concession to Brisset, that a man

who, as a matter of fact, was perfectly well was dead, and recognize with Camèristus that a man might be living on after his apparent demise. He found something sensible in every theory, and embraced none of them, claiming that the best of all systems of medicine was to have none at all, and to stick to the facts. This Panurge of the Clinical Schools, the king of observers, the great investigator, great sceptic, the man of desperate expedients, was scrutinizing the Wild Ass's Skin.

"I should very much like to be a witness of the coincidence of its retrenchment with your wish," he said to the marquis.

"Where is the use?" cried Brisset.

"Where is the use?" echoed Camèristus.

"Ah, you are both of the same mind," replied Maugredie.

"The contraction is perfectly simple," Brisset went on.

"It is supernatural," remarked Camèristus.

"In short," Maugredie made answer, with affected solemnity, and handing the piece of skin to Raphael as he spoke, "the shrivelling faculty of the skin is a fact inexplicable, and yet quite natural, which, ever since the world began, has been the despair of medicine and of pretty women."

All Valentin's observation could discover no trace of a feeling for his troubles in any of the three doctors. The three received every answer in silence, scanned him unconcernedly, and interrogated him unsympathetically. Politeness did not conceal their indifference; whether deliberation or certainty was the cause, their words at any rate came so seldom and so languidly, that at times Raphael thought that their attention was wandering. From time to time Brisset, the sole speaker, remarked, "Good! just so!" as Bianchon pointed out the existence of each desperate symptom. Camèristus seemed to be deep in meditation; Maugredie looked like a comic author, studying two queer characters with a view to reproducing them faithfully upon the stage. There was deep, unconcealed distress and grave compassion in Horace Bianchon's face. He had been a doctor

for too short a time to be untouched by suffering and unmoved by a deathbed; he had not learned to keep back the sympathetic tears that obscure a man's clear vision and prevent him from seizing, like the general of an army, upon the auspicious moment for victory, in utter disregard of the groans of dying men.

After spending about half an hour over taking in some sort the measure of the patient and the complaint, much as a tailor measures a young man for a coat when he orders his wedding outfit, the authorities uttered several commonplaces, and even talked of politics. Then they decided to go into Raphael's study to exchange their ideas and frame their verdict.

"May I not be present during the discussion, gentlemen?" Valentin had asked them, but Brisset and Maugredie protested against this, and, in spite of their patient's entreaties, declined altogether to deliberate in his presence.

Raphael gave way before their custom, thinking that he could slip into a passage adjoining, whence he could easily overhear the medical conference in which the three professors were about to engage.

"Permit me, gentlemen," said Brisset, as they entered, "to give you my opinion at once. I neither wish to force it upon you nor to have it discussed. In the first place, it is unbiased, concise, and based on an exact similarity that exists between one of my own patients and the subject that we have been called in to examine; and, moreover, I am expected at my hospital. The importance of the case that demands my presence there will excuse me for speaking the first word. The subject with which we are concerned has been exhausted in an equal degree by intellectual labors—what did he set about, Horace?" he asked of the young doctor.

"A 'Theory of the Will.'"

"The devil! but that's a big subject. He is exhausted, I say, by too much brain-work, by irregular courses, and by the repeated use of too powerful stimulants. Violent

exertion of body and mind has demoralized the whole system. It is easy, gentlemen, to recognize in the symptoms of the face and body generally intense irritation of the stomach, an affection of the great sympathetic nerve, acute sensibility of the epigastric region, and contraction of the right and left hypochondriac. You have noticed, too, the large size and prominence of the liver. M. Bianchon has, besides, constantly watched the patient, and he tells us that digestion is troublesome and difficult. Strictly speaking, there is no stomach left, and so the man has disappeared. The brain is atrophied because the man digests no longer. The progressive deterioration wrought in the epigastric region, the seat of vitality, his vitiated the whole system. Thence, by continuous fevered vibrations, the disorder has reached the brain by means of the nervous plexus, hence the excessive irritation in that organ. There is monomania. The patient is burdened with a fixed idea. That piece of skin really contracts, to his way of thinking; very likely it always has been as we have seen it; but whether it contracts or no, that thing is for him just like the fly that some Grand Vizier or other had on his nose. If you put leeches at once on the epigastrium, and reduce the irritation in that part, which is the very seat of man's life, and if you diet the patient, the monomania will leave him. I will say no more to Dr. Bianchon; he should be able to grasp the whole treatment as well as the details. There may be, perhaps, some complication of the disease—the bronchial tubes, possibly, may be also inflamed; but, I believe, that treatment for the intestinal organs is very much more important and necessary and more urgently required than for the lungs. Persistent study of abstract matters, and certain violent passions, have induced serious disorders in that vital mechanism. However, we are in time to set these conditions right. Nothing is too seriously affected. You will easily get your friend round again," he remarked to Bianchon.

"Our learned colleague is taking the effect for the cause,"

Camëristus replied. "Yes, the changes that he has observed so keenly certainly exist in the patient; but it is not the stomach that, by degrees, has set up nervous action in the system, and so affected the brain, like a hole in a window pane spreading cracks round about it. It took a blow of some kind to make a hole in the window; who gave the blow? Do we know that? Have we investigated the patient's case sufficiently? Are we acquainted with all the events of his life?

"The vital principle, gentlemen," he continued, "the Archeus of Van Helmont, is affected in his case—the very essence and centre of life is attacked. The divine spark, the transitory intelligence which holds the organism together, which is the source of the will, the inspiration of life, has ceased to regulate the daily phenomena of the mechanism and the functions of every organ; thence arise all the complications which my learned colleague has so thoroughly appreciated. The epigastric region does not affect the brain, but the brain affects the epigastric region. No," he went on, vigorously slapping his chest, "no, I am not a stomach in the form of a man. No, everything does not lie there. I do not feel that I have the courage to say that if the epigastric region is in good order, everything else is in a like condition—

"We cannot trace," he went on more mildly, "to one physical cause the serious disturbances that supervene in this or that subject which has been dangerously attacked, nor submit them to a uniform treatment. No one man is like another. We have each peculiar organs, differently affected, diversely nourished, adapted to perform different functions, and to induce a condition necessary to the accomplishment of an order of things which is unknown to us. The sublime will has so wrought that a little portion of the great All is set within us to sustain the phenomena of living; in every man it formulates itself distinctly, making each, to all appearance, a separate individual, yet in one point coexistent with the infinite cause. So we ought to

make a separate study of each subject, discover all about it, find out in what its life consists, and wherein its power lies. From the softness of a wet sponge to the hardness of pumice-stone there are infinite fine degrees of difference. Man is just like that. Between the sponge-like organizations of the lymphatic and the vigorous iron muscles of such men as are destined for a long life, what a margin for errors for the single inflexible system of a lowering treatment to commit; a system that reduces the capacities of the human frame, which you always conclude have been overexcited. Let us look for the origin of the disease in the mental and not in the physical viscera. A doctor is an inspired being, endowed by God with a special gift—the power to read the secrets of vitality; just as the prophet has received the eyes that foresee the future, the poet his faculty of evoking nature, and the musician the power of arranging sounds in a harmonious order that is possibly a copy of an ideal harmony on high."

"There is his everlasting system of medicine, arbitrary, monarchical, and pious," muttered Brisset.

"Gentlemen," Maugredie broke in hastily, to distract attention from Brisset's comment, "don't let us lose sight of the patient."

"What is the good of science?" Raphael moaned. "Here is my recovery halting between a string of beads and a rosary of leeches, between Dupuytren's bistoury and Prince Hohenlohe's prayer. There is Maugredie suspending his judgment on the line that divides facts from words, mind from matter. Man's 'it is,' 'and it is not,' is always on my track; it is the *Carymary Carymara* of Rabelais for evermore: my disorder is spiritual, *Carymary*, or material, *Carymara*. Shall I live? They have no idea. Planchette was more straightforward with me, at any rate, when he said, 'I do not know.'"

Just then Valentin heard Maugredie's voice.

"The patient suffers from monomania; very good, I am quite of that opinion," he said, "but he has two hundred thousand a year; monomaniacs of that kind are very un-

common. As for knowing whether his epigastric region has affected his brain, or his brain his epigastric region, we shall find that out, perhaps, whenever he dies. But to resume. There is no disputing the fact that he is ill; some sort of treatment he must have. Let us leave theories alone, and put leeches on him, to counteract the nervous and intestinal irritation, as to the existence of which we all agree; and let us send him to drink the waters; in that way we shall act on both systems at once. If there really is tubercular disease, we can hardly expect to save his life; so that—"

Raphael abruptly left the passage, and went back to his armchair. The four doctors very soon came out of the study; Horace was the spokesman.

"These gentlemen," he told him, "have unanimously agreed that leeches must be applied to the stomach at once, and that both physical and moral treatment are imperatively needed. In the first place, a carefully prescribed rule of diet, so as to soothe the internal irritation"—here Brisset signified his approval; "and in the second, a hygienic regimen, to set your general condition right. We all, therefore, recommend you to go to take the waters at Aix in Savoy; or, if you like it better, at Mont Dore in Auvergne; the air and the situation are both pleasanter in Savoy than in the Cantal, but you will consult your own taste."

Here it was Caméristus who nodded assent.

"These gentlemen," Bianchon continued, "having recognized a slight affection of the respiratory organs, are agreed as to the utility of the previous course of treatment that I have prescribed. They think that there will be no difficulty about restoring you to health, and that everything depends upon a wise and alternate employment of these various means. And—"

"And that is the cause of the milk in the cocoanut," said Raphael, with a smile, as he led Horace into his study to pay the fees for this useless consultation.

"Their conclusions are logical," the young doctor replied.

"Caméristus feels, Brisset examines, Maugredie doubts. Has not man a soul, a body, and an intelligence? One of these three elemental constituents always influences us more or less strongly; there will always be the personal element in human science. Believe me, Raphael, we effect no cures; we only assist them. Another system — the use of mild remedies while Nature exerts her powers—lies between the extremes of theory of Brisset and Caméristus, but one ought to have known the patient for some ten years or so to obtain a good result on these lines. Negation lies at the back of all medicine, as in every other science. So endeavor to live wholesomely; try a trip to Savoy; the best course is, and always will be, to trust to Nature."

It was a month later, on a fine summer-like evening, that several people, who were taking the waters at Aix, returned from the promenade and met together in the salons of the Club. Raphael remained alone by a window for a long time. His back was turned upon the gathering, and he himself was deep in those involuntary musings in which thoughts arise in succession and fade away, shaping themselves indistinctly, passing over us like thin, almost colorless clouds. Melancholy is sweet to us then, and delight is shadowy, for the soul is half asleep. Valentin gave himself up to this life of sensations; he was steeping himself in the warm, soft twilight, enjoying the pure air with the scent of the hills in it, happy in that he felt no pain, and had tranquillized his threatening Wild Ass's Skin at last. It grew cooler as the red glow of the sunset faded on the mountain peaks; he shut the window and left his place.

"Will you be so kind as not to close the windows, sir?" said an old lady; "we are being stifled—"

The peculiarly sharp and jarring tones in which the phrase was uttered grated on Raphael's ears; it fell on them like an indiscreet remark let slip by some man in whose friendship we would fain believe, a word which reveals unsuspected depths of selfishness and destroys some pleasing sentimental illusion of ours. The marquis glanced, with the cool inscrutable ex-

pression of a diplomatist, at the old lady, called a servant, and when he came curtly bade him—"Open that window."

Great surprise was clearly expressed on all faces at the words. The whole roomful began to whisper to each other, and turned their eyes upon the invalid, as though he had given some serious offence. Raphael, who had never quite managed to rid himself of the bashfulness of his early youth, felt a momentary confusion; then he shook off his torpor, exerted his faculties, and asked himself the meaning of this strange scene.

A sudden and rapid impulse quickened his brain; the past weeks appeared before him in a clear and definite vision; the reasons for the feelings he inspired in others stood out for him in relief, like the veins of some corpse which a naturalist, by some cunningly contrived injection, has colored so as to show their least ramifications.

He discerned himself in this fleeting picture; he followed out his own life in it, thought by thought, day after day. He saw himself, not without astonishment, an absent gloomy figure in the midst of these lively folk, always musing over his own fate, always absorbed by his own sufferings, seemingly impatient of the most harmless chat. He saw how he had shunned the ephemeral intimacies that travellers are so ready to establish—no doubt because they feel sure of never meeting each other again—and how he had taken little heed of those about him. He saw himself like the rocks without, unmoved by the caresses or the stormy surgings of the waves.

Then, by a gift of insight seldom accorded, he read the thoughts of all those about him. The light of a candle revealed the sardonic profile and yellow cranium of an old man; he remembered now that he had won from him, and had never proposed that the other should have his revenge; a little further on he saw a pretty woman, whose lively advances he had met with frigid coolness; there was not a face there that did not reproach him with some wrong done, inexplicably to all appearance, but the real offence in every

case lay in some mortification, some invisible hurt dealt to self-love. He had unintentionally jarred on all the small susceptibilities of the circle round about him.

His guests on various occasions, and those to whom he had lent his horses, had taken offence at his luxurious ways; their ungraciousness had been a surprise to him; he had spared them further humiliations of that kind, and they had considered that he looked down upon them, and had accused him of haughtiness ever since. He could read their inmost thoughts as he fathomed their natures in this way. Society with its polish and varnish grew loathsome to him. He was envied and hated for his wealth and superior ability; his reserve baffled the inquisitive; his humility seemed like haughtiness to these petty superficial natures. He guessed the secret unpardonable crime which he had committed against them; he had overstepped the limits of the jurisdiction of their mediocrity. He had resisted their inquisitorial tyranny; he could dispense with their society; and all of them, therefore, had instinctively combined to make him feel their power, and to take revenge upon this incipient royalty by submitting him to a kind of ostracism, and so teaching him that they in their turn could do without him.

Pity came over him, first of all, at this aspect of mankind, but very soon he shuddered at the thought of the power that came thus, at will, and flung aside for him the veil of flesh under which the moral nature is hidden away. He closed his eyes, so as to see no more. A black curtain was drawn all at once over this unlucky phantom show of truth; but still he found himself in the terrible loneliness that surrounds every power and dominion. Just then a violent fit of coughing seized him. Far from receiving one single word—indifferent, and meaningless, it is true, but still containing, among well-bred people brought together by chance, at least some pretence of civil commiseration—he now heard hostile ejaculations and muttered complaints. Society there assembled disdained any pantomime on his account, perhaps because he had gauged its real nature too well.

"His complaint is contagious."

"The president of the Club ought to forbid him to enter the salon."

"It is contrary to all rules and regulations to cough in that way!"

"When a man is as ill as that he ought not to come to take the waters."

"He will drive me away from the place."

Raphael rose and walked about the rooms to screen himself from their unanimous execrations. He thought to find a shelter, and went up to a young lady who sat doing nothing, minded to address some pretty speeches to her; but as he came toward her, she turned her back upon him, and pretended to be watching the dancers. Raphael feared lest he might have made use of the talisman already that evening; and feeling that he had neither the wish nor the courage to break into the conversation, he left the salon and took refuge in the billiard-room. No one there greeted him, nobody spoke to him, no one sent so much as a friendly glance in his direction. His turn of mind, naturally meditative, had discovered instinctively the general grounds and reasons for the aversion he inspired. This little world was obeying, unconsciously perhaps, the sovereign law which rules over polite society; its inexorable nature was becoming apparent in its entirety to Raphael's eyes. A glance into the past showed it to him, as a type completely realized in Fœdora.

He would no more meet with sympathy here for his bodily ills than he had received it at her hands for the distress in his heart. The fashionable world expels every suffering creature from its midst, just as the body of a man in robust health rejects any germ of disease. The world holds suffering and misfortune in abhorrence; it dreads them like the plague; it never hesitates between vice and trouble, for vice is a luxury. Ill-fortune may possess a majesty of its own, but society can belittle it and make it ridiculous by an epigram. Society draws caricatures, and in this way flings in the teeth of fallen kings the affronts which it fancies it has

received from them; society, like the Roman youth at the circus, never shows mercy to the fallen gladiator; mockery and money are its vital necessities. "Death to the weak!" That is the oath taken by this kind of Equestrian order, instituted in their midst by all the nations of the world; everywhere it makes for the elevation of the rich, and its motto is deeply graven in hearts that wealth has turned to stone, or that have been reared in aristocratic prejudices.

Assemble a collection of schoolboys together. That will give you a society in miniature, a miniature which represents life more truly, because it is so frank and artless; and in it you will always find poor isolated beings, relegated to some place in the general estimation between pity and contempt, on account of their weakness and suffering. To these the Evangel promises heaven hereafter. Go lower yet in the scale of organized creation. If some bird among its fellows in the courtyard sickens, the others fall upon it with their beaks, pluck out its feathers, and kill it. The whole world, in accordance with its charter of egotism, brings all its severity to bear upon wretchedness that has the hardihood to spoil its festivities, and to trouble its joys.

Any sufferer in mind or body, any helpless or poor man, is a pariah. He had better remain in his solitude; if he crosses the boundary line, he will find winter everywhere; he will find freezing cold in other men's looks, manners, words, and hearts; and lucky indeed is he if he does not receive an insult where he expected that sympathy would be expended upon him. Let the dying keep to their bed of neglect, and age sit lonely by its fireside. Portionless maids, freeze and burn in your solitary attics. If the world tolerates misery of any kind, it is to turn it to account for its own purposes, to make some use of it, saddle and bridle it, put a bit in its mouth, ride it about, and get some fun out of it.

Crotchety spinsters, ladies' companions, put a cheerful face upon it, endure the humors of your so-called benefactress, carry her lapdogs for her; you have an English poodle

for your rival, and you must seek to understand the moods of your patroness, and amuse her, and—keep silence about yourselves. As for you, unblushing parasite, uncrowned king of unliveried servants, leave your real character at home, let your digestion keep pace with your host's, laugh when he laughs, mingle your tears with his, and find his epigrams amusing; if you want to relieve your mind about him, wait till he is ruined. That is the way the world shows its respect for the unfortunate; it persecutes them, or slays them; it deprives them of their manhood, or humbles them in the dust.

Such thoughts as these welled up in Raphael's heart with the suddenness of poetic inspiration. He looked around him, and felt the influence of the forbidding gloom that society breathes out in order to rid itself of the unfortunate; it nipped his soul more effectually than the east wind grips the body in December. He locked his arms over his chest, set his back against the wall, and fell into a deep melancholy. He mused upon the meagre happiness that this depressing way of living can give. What did it amount to? Amusement with no pleasure in it, gayety without gladness, joyless festivity, fevered dreams empty of all delight, firewood or ashes on the hearth without a spark of flame in them. When he raised his head, he found himself alone, all the billiard players had gone.

"I have only to let them know my power to make them worship my coughing fits," he said to himself, and wrapped himself against the world in the cloak of his contempt.

Next day the resident doctor came to call upon him, and took an anxious interest in his health. Raphael felt a thrill of joy at the friendly words addressed to him. The doctor's face, to his thinking, wore an expression that was kind and pleasant; the pale curls of his wig seemed redolent of philanthropy; the square cut of his coat, the loose folds of his trousers, his big Quaker-like shoes, everything about him down to the powder shaken from his queue and dusted in a circle upon his slightly stooping shoulders, revealed an

apostolic nature, and spoke of Christian charity and of the self-sacrifice of a man, who, out of sheer devotion to his patients, had compelled himself to learn to play whist and tric-trac so well that he never lost money to any of them.

"My Lord Marquis," said he, after a long talk with Raphael, "I can dispel your uneasiness beyond all doubt. I know your constitution well enough by this time to assure you that the doctors in Paris, whose great abilities I know, are mistaken as to the nature of your complaint. You can live as long as Methuselah, my Lord Marquis, accidents only excepted. Your lungs are as sound as a blacksmith's bellows, your stomach would put an ostrich to the blush; but if you persist in living at a high altitude, you are running the risk of a prompt interment in consecrated soil. A few words, my Lord Marquis, will make my meaning clear to you.

"Chemistry," he began, "has shown us that man's breathing is a real process of combustion, and the intensity of its action varies according to the abundance or scarcity of the phlogistic element stored up by the organism of each individual. In your case, the phlogistic or inflammatory element is abundant; if you will permit me to put it so, you generate superfluous oxygen, possessing as you do the inflammatory temperament of a man destined to experience strong emotions. While you breathe the keen, pure air that stimulates life in men of lymphatic constitution, you are accelerating an expenditure of vitality already too rapid. One of the conditions of existence for you is the heavier atmosphere of the plains and valleys. Yes, the vital air for a man consumed by his genius lies in the fertile pasture-lands of Germany, at Toplitz or Baden-Baden. If England is not obnoxious to you, its misty climate would reduce your fever; but the situation of our baths, a thousand feet above the level of the Mediterranean, is dangerous for you. That is my opinion at least," he said, with a deprecatory gesture, "and I give it in opposition to our interests, for, if you act upon it, we shall unfortunately lose you."

But for these closing words of his, the affable doctor's seeming good-nature would have completely won Raphael over; but he was too profoundly observant not to understand the meaning of the tone, the look and gesture that accompanied that mild sarcasm, not to see that the little man had been sent on this errand, no doubt, by a flock of his rejoicing patients. The florid-looking idlers, tedious old women, nomad English people, and fine ladies who had given their husbands the slip, and were escorted hither by their lovers—one and all were in a plot to drive away a wretched, feeble creature about to die, who seemed unable to hold out against a daily renewed persecution! Raphael accepted the challenge; he foresaw some amusement to be derived from their manœuvres.

"As you would be so grieved at losing me," said he to the doctor, "I will endeavor to avail myself of your good advice without leaving the place. I will set about having a house built to-morrow, and the atmosphere within it shall be regulated by your instructions."

The doctor understood the sarcastic smile that lurked about Raphael's mouth, and took his leave without finding another word to say.

The Lake of Bourget lies seven hundred feet above the Mediterranean, in a great hollow among the jagged peaks of the hills; it sparkles there, the bluest drop of water in the world. From the summit of the Cat's Tooth the lake below looks like a stray turquoise. This lovely sheet of water is about twenty-seven miles round, and in some places is nearly five hundred feet deep.

Under the cloudless sky, in your boat in the midst of the great expanse of water, with only the sound of the oars in your ears, only the vague outline of the hills on the horizon before you, you admire the glittering snows of the French Maurienne; you pass, now by masses of granite clad in the velvet of green turf or in low-growing shrubs, now by pleasant sloping meadows; there is always a wilderness on the one hand and fertile lands on the other, and both harmonies

and dissonances compose a scene for you where everything is at once small and vast, and you feel yourself to be a poor onlooker at a great banquet. The configuration of the mountains brings about misleading optical conditions and illusions of perspective; a pine-tree a hundred feet in height looks to be a mere reed; wide valleys look as narrow as meadow paths. The lake is the only one where the confidences of heart and heart can be exchanged. There one can love; there one can meditate. Nowhere on earth will you find a closer understanding between the water, the sky, the mountains, and the fields. There is a balm there for all the agitations of life. The place keeps the secrets of sorrow to itself, the sorrow that grows less beneath its soothing influence, and to love it gives a grave and meditative cast, deepening passion and purifying it. A kiss there becomes something great. But beyond all other things it is the lake for memories; it aids them by lending to them the hues of its own waves; it is a mirror in which everything is reflected. Only here, with this lovely landscape all around him, could Raphael endure the burden laid upon him; here he could remain as a languid dreamer, without a wish of his own.

He went out upon the lake after the doctor's visit, and was landed at a lonely point on the pleasant slope where the village of Saint-Innocent is situated. The view from this promontory, as one may call it, comprises the heights of Bugey with the Rhone flowing at their foot, and the end of the lake; but Raphael liked to look at the opposite shore from thence, at the melancholy looking Abbey of Haute-Combe, the burying-place of the Sardinian kings, who lie prostrate there before the hills, like pilgrims come at last to their journey's end. The silence of the landscape was broken by the even rhythm of the strokes of the oar; it seemed to find a voice for the place, in monotonous cadences like the chanting of monks. The marquis was surprised to find visitors to this usually lonely part of the lake; and as he mused, he watched the people seated in the boat, and

recognized in the stern the elderly lady who had spoken so harshly to him the evening before.

No one took any notice of Raphael as the boat passed, except the elderly lady's companion, a poor old maid of noble family, who bowed to him, and whom it seemed to him that he saw for the first time. A few seconds later he had already forgotten the visitors, who had rapidly disappeared behind the promontory, when he heard the fluttering of a dress and the sound of light footsteps not far from him. He turned about and saw the companion; and, guessing from her embarrassed manner that she wished to speak with him, he walked toward her.

She was somewhere about thirty-six years of age, thin and tall, reserved and prim, and, like all old maids, seemed puzzled to know which way to look, an expression no longer in keeping with her measured, springless, and hesitating steps. She was both young and old at the same time, and, by a certain dignity in her carriage, showed the high value which she set upon her charms and perfections. In addition, her movements were all demure and discreet, like those of women who are accustomed to take great care of themselves, no doubt because they desire not to be cheated of love, their destined end.

"Your life is in danger, sir; do not come to the Club again!" she said, stepping back a pace or two from Raphael, as if her reputation had been already compromised.

"But, mademoiselle," said Raphael, smiling, "please explain yourself more clearly, since you have condescended so far—"

"Ah," she answered, "unless I had had a very strong motive, I should never have run the risk of offending the countess, for if she ever came to know that I had warned you—"

"And who would tell her, mademoiselle?" cried Raphael.

"True," the old maid answered. She looked at him, quaking like an owl out in the sunlight. "But think of yourself," she went on; "several young men, who want to

drive you away from the baths, have agreed to pick a quarrel with you, and to force you into a duel."

The elderly lady's voice sounded in the distance.

"Mademoiselle," began the marquis, "my gratitude—" But his protectress had fled already; she had heard the voice of her mistress squeaking afresh among the rocks.

"Poor girl! unhappiness always understands and helps the unhappy," Raphael thought, and sat himself down at the foot of a tree.

The key of every science is, beyond cavil, the mark of interrogation; we owe most of our greatest discoveries to a *Why?* and all the wisdom in the world, perhaps, consists in asking *Wherefore?* in every connection. But, on the other hand, this acquired prescience is the ruin of our illusions.

So Valentin, having taken the old maid's kindly action for the text of his wandering thoughts, without the deliberate promptings of philosophy, must find it full of gall and wormwood.

"It is not at all extraordinary that a gentlewoman's gentlewoman should take a fancy to me," said he to himself. "I am twenty-seven years old, and I have a title and an income of two hundred thousand a year. But that her mistress, who hates water like a rabid cat—for it would be hard to give the palm to either in that matter—that her mistress should have brought her here in a boat! Is not that very strange and wonderful? Those two women came into Savoy to sleep like marmots; they ask if day has dawned at noon; and to think that they could get up this morning before eight o'clock, to take their chance in running after me!"

Very soon the old maid and her elderly innocence became, in his eyes, a fresh manifestation of that artificial, malicious little world. It was a paltry device, a clumsy artifice, a piece of priest's or woman's craft. Was the duel a myth, or did they merely want to frighten him? But these petty creatures, impudent and teasing as flies, had succeeded in wounding his vanity, in rousing his pride, and exciting his curiosity. Unwilling to become their dupe, or to be taken

for a coward, and even diverted perhaps by the little drama, he went to the Club that very evening.

He stood leaning against the marble chimney-piece, and stayed there quietly in the middle of the principal saloon, doing his best to give no one any advantage over him; but he scrutinized the faces about him, and gave a certain vague offence to those assembled, by his inspection. Like a dog aware of his strength, he awaited the contest on his own ground, without unnecessary barking. Toward the end of the evening he strolled into the cardroom, walking between the door and another that opened into the billiard-room, throwing a glance from time to time over a group of young men that had gathered there. He heard his name mentioned after a turn or two. Although they lowered their voices, Raphael easily guessed that he had become the topic of their debate, and he ended by catching a phrase or two spoken aloud.

"You?"

"Yes, I."

"I dare you to do it!"

"Let us make a bet on it!"

"Oh, he will do it."

Just as Valentin, curious to learn the matter of the wager, came up to pay closer attention to what they were saying, a tall, strong, good-looking young fellow, who, however, possessed the impertinent stare peculiar to people who have material force at their back, came out of the billiard-room.

"I am deputed, sir," he said, coolly addressing the marquis, "to make you aware of something which you do not seem to know; your face and person generally are a source of annoyance to every one here, and to me in particular. You have too much politeness not to sacrifice yourself to the public good, and I beg that you will not show yourself in the Club again."

"This sort of joke has been perpetrated before, sir, in garrison towns at the time of the Empire; but nowadays it is exceedingly bad form," said Raphael dryly.

"I am not joking," the young man answered; "and I repeat it: your health will be considerably the worse for a stay here; the heat and light, the air of the saloon, and the company are all bad for your complaint."

"Where did you study medicine?" Raphael inquired.

"I took my bachelor's degree on Lepage's shooting-ground in Paris, and was made a doctor at Cerizier's, the king of foils."

"There is one last degree left for you to take," said Valentin; "study the ordinary rules of politeness, and you will be a perfect gentleman."

The young men all came out of the billiard-room just then, some disposed to laugh, some silent. The attention of other players was drawn to the matter; they left their cards to watch a quarrel that rejoiced their instincts. Raphael, alone among this hostile crowd, did his best to keep cool, and not to put himself in any way in the wrong; but his adversary having ventured a sarcasm containing an insult couched in unusually keen language, he replied gravely—"We cannot box men's ears, sir, in these days, but I am at a loss for any word by which to stigmatize such cowardly behavior as yours."

"That's enough, that's enough. You can come to an explanation to-morrow," several young men exclaimed, interposing between the two champions.

Raphael left the room in the character of aggressor, after he had accepted a proposal to meet near the Château de Bordeau, in a little sloping meadow, not very far from the newly made road, by which the man who came off victorious could reach Lyons. Raphael must now either take to his bed or leave the baths. The visitors had gained their point. At eight o'clock next morning his antagonist, followed by two seconds and a surgeon, arrived first on the ground.

"We shall do very nicely here; glorious weather for a duel!" he cried gayly, looking at the blue vault of sky above, at the waters of the lake, and the rocks, without a single melancholy presentiment or doubt of the issue. "If

I wing him," he went on, "I shall send him to bed for a month; eh, doctor?"

"At the very least," the surgeon replied; "but let that willow twig alone, or you will weary your wrist, and then you will not fire steadily. You might kill your man then instead of wounding him."

The noise of a carriage was heard approaching.

"Here he is," said the seconds, who soon descried a calèche coming along the road; it was drawn by four horses, and there were two postilions.

"What a queer proceeding!" said Valentin's antagonist; "here he comes posthaste to be shot."

The slightest incident about a duel, as about a stake at cards, makes an impression on the minds of those deeply concerned in the results of the affair; so the young man awaited the arrival of the carriage with a kind of uneasiness. It stopped in the road; old Jonathan laboriously descended from it, in the first place, to assist Raphael to alight; he supported him with his feeble arms, and showed him all the minute attentions that a lover lavishes upon his mistress. Both became lost to sight in the footpath that lay between the highroad and the field where the duel was to take place; they were walking slowly and did not appear again for some time after. The four onlookers at this strange spectacle felt deeply moved by the sight of Valentin as he leaned on his servant's arm; he was wasted and pale; he limped as if he had the gout, went with his head bowed down, and said not a word. You might have taken them for a couple of old men, one broken with years, the other worn out with thought; the elder bore his age visibly written in his white hair, the younger was of no age.

"I have not slept all night, sir;" so Raphael greeted his antagonist.

The icy tone and terrible glance that went with the words made the real aggressor shudder; he knew that he was in the wrong, and felt in secret ashamed of his behavior. There was something strange in Raphael's bearing, tone, and ges-

ture; the marquis stopped, and every one else was likewise silent. The uneasy and constrained feeling grew to a height.

"There is yet time," he went on, "to offer me some slight apology; and offer it you must, or you will die, sir! You rely even now on your dexterity, and do not shrink from an encounter in which you believe all the advantage to be upon your side. Very good, sir; I am generous, I am letting you know my superiority beforehand. I possess a terrible power. I have only to wish to do so, and I can neutralize your skill, dim your eyesight, make your hand and pulse unsteady, and even kill you outright. I have no wish to be compelled to exercise my power; the use of it costs me too dear. You would not be the only one to die. So if you refuse to apologize to me, no matter what your experience in murder, your ball will go into the waterfall there, and mine will speed straight to your heart though I do not aim it at you."

Confused voices interrupted Raphael at this point. All the time that he was speaking, the marquis had kept his intolerably keen gaze fixed upon his antagonist; now he drew himself up and showed an impassive face, like that of a dangerous madman.

"Make him hold his tongue," the young man had said to one of his seconds; "that voice of his is tearing the heart out of me."

"Say no more, sir; it is quite useless," cried the seconds and the surgeon, addressing Raphael.

"Gentlemen, I am fulfilling a duty. Has this young gentleman any final arrangements to make?"

"That is enough; that will do."

The marquis remained standing steadily, never for a moment losing sight of his antagonist; and the latter seemed, like a bird before a snake, to be overwhelmed by a wellnigh magical power. He was compelled to endure that homicidal gaze; he met and shunned it incessantly.

"I am thirsty; give me some water—" he said again to the second.

"Are you nervous?"

"Yes," he answered. "There is a fascination about that man's glowing eyes."

"Will you apologize?"

"It is too late now."

The two antagonists were placed at fifteen paces distant from each other. Each of them had a brace of pistols at hand, and, according to the programme prescribed for them, each was to fire twice when and how he pleased, but after the signal had been given by the seconds.

"What are you doing, Charles?" exclaimed the young man who acted as second to Raphael's antagonist; "you are putting in the ball before the powder!"

"I am a dead man," he muttered, by way of answer; "you have put me facing the sun—"

"The sun lies behind you," said Valentin sternly and solemnly, while he coolly loaded his pistol without heeding the fact that the signal had been given, or that his antagonist was carefully taking aim.

There was something so appalling in this supernatural unconcern, that it affected even the two postilions, brought thither by a cruel curiosity. Raphael was either trying his power or playing with it, for he talked to Jonathan, and looked toward him as he received his adversary's fire. Charles's bullet broke a branch of willow, and ricocheted over the surface of the water; Raphael fired at random, and shot his antagonist through the heart. He did not heed the young man as he dropped; he hurriedly sought the Wild Ass's Skin to see what another man's life had cost him. The talisman was no larger than a small oak-leaf.

"What are you gaping at, you postilions over there? Let us be off," said the marquis.

That same evening he crossed the French border, immediately set out for Auvergne, and reached the springs of Mont Dore. As he travelled, there surged up in his heart, all at once, one of those thoughts that come to us as a ray of sunlight pierces through the thick mists in some dark valley —a sad enlightenment, a pitiless sagacity that lights up the

accomplished fact for us, that lays our errors bare and leaves us without excuse in our own eyes. It suddenly struck him that the possession of power, no matter how enormous, did not bring with it the knowledge how to use it. The sceptre is a plaything for a child, an axe for a Richelieu, and for a Napoleon a lever by which to move the world. Power leaves us just as it finds us; only great natures grow greater by its means. Raphael had had everything in his power, and he had done nothing.

At the springs of Mont Dore he came again in contact with a little world of people, who invariably shunned him with the eager haste that animals display when they scent afar off one of their own species lying dead, and flee away. The dislike was mutual. His late adventure had given him a deep distaste for society; his first care, consequently, was to find a lodging at some distance from the neighborhood of the springs. Instinctively he felt within him the need of close contact with nature, of natural emotions, and of the vegetative life into which we sink so gladly among the fields.

The day after he arrived he climbed the Pic de Sancy, not without difficulty, and visited the higher valleys, the skyey nooks, undiscovered lakes, and peasants' huts about Mont Dore, a country whose stern and wild features are now beginning to tempt the brushes of our artists, for sometimes wonderfully fresh and charming views are to be found there, affording a strong contrast to the frowning brows of those lonely hills.

Barely a league from the village Raphael discovered a nook where nature seemed to have taken a pleasure in hiding away all her treasures like some glad and mischievous child. At the first sight of this unspoiled and picturesque retreat, he determined to take up his abode in it. There, life must needs be peaceful, natural, and fruitful, like the life of a plant.

Imagine for yourself an inverted cone of granite hollowed out on a large scale, a sort of basin with its sides divided up by queer winding paths. On one side lay level stretches with

no growth upon them, a bluish uniform surface, over which the rays of the sun fell as upon a mirror; on the other lay cliffs split open by fissures and frowning ravines; great blocks of lava hung suspended from them, while the action of rain slowly prepared their impending fall; a few stunted trees, tormented by the wind, often crowned their summits; and here and there in some sheltered angle of their ramparts a clump of chestnut trees grew tall as cedars, or some cavern in the yellowish rock showed the dark entrance into its depths, set about by flowers and brambles, decked by a little strip of green turf.

At the bottom of this cup, which perhaps had been the crater of an old-world volcano, lay a pool of water as pure and bright as a diamond. Granite bowlders lay around the deep basin, and willows, mountain-ash trees, yellow-flag lilies, and numberless aromatic plants bloomed about it, in a realm of meadow as fresh as an English bowling-green. The fine soft grass was watered by the streams that trickled through the fissures in the cliffs; the soil was continually enriched by the deposits of loam which storms washed down from the heights above. The pool might be some three acres in extent; its shape was irregular, and the edges were scalloped like the hem of a dress; the meadow might be an acre or two acres in extent. The cliffs and the water approached and receded from each other; here and there, there was scarcely width enough for the cows to pass between them.

After a certain height the plant life ceased. Aloft in air the granite took upon itself the most fantastic shapes, and assumed those misty tints that give to high mountains a dim resemblance to clouds in the sky. The bare, bleak cliffs, with the fearful rents in their sides, pictures of wild and barren desolation, contrasted strongly with the pretty view of the valley; and so strange were the shapes they assumed that one of the cliffs had been called "The Capuchin," because it was so like a monk. Sometimes these sharp-pointed peaks, these mighty masses of rock, and airy caverns were

lighted up one by one, according to the direction of the sun or the caprices of the atmosphere; they caught gleams of gold, dyed themselves in purple, took a tint of glowing rose-color, or turned dull and gray. Upon the heights a drama of color was always to be seen, a play of ever-shifting iridescent hues like those on a pigeon's breast.

Oftentimes at sunrise or at sunset a ray of bright sunlight would penetrate between two sheer surfaces of lava, that might have been split apart by a hatchet, to the very depths of that pleasant little garden, where it would play in the waters of the pool, like a beam of golden light which gleams through the chinks of a shutter into a room in Spain that has been carefully darkened for a siesta. When the sun rose above the old crater that some antediluvian revolution had filled with water, its rocky sides took warmer tones, the extinct volcano glowed again, and its sudden heat quickened the sprouting seeds and vegetation, gave color to the flowers, and ripened the fruits of this forgotten corner of the earth.

As Raphael reached it, he noticed several cows grazing in the pasture-land; and when he had taken a few steps toward the water, he saw a little house built of granite and roofed with shingle in the spot where the meadow-land was at its widest. The roof of this little cottage harmonized with everything about it; for it had long been overgrown with ivy, moss, and flowers of no recent date. A thin smoke, that did not scare the birds away, went up from the dilapidated chimney. There was a great bench at the door between two huge honeysuckle bushes, that were pink with blossom and full of scent. The walls could scarcely be seen for branches of vine and sprays of rose and jessamine that interlaced and grew entirely as chance and their own will bade them; for the inmates of the cottage seemed to pay no attention to the growth which adorned their house, and to take no care of it, leaving to it the fresh capricious charm of nature.

Some clothes spread out on the gooseberry bushes were drying in the sun. A cat was sitting on a machine for strip-

ping hemp; beneath it lay a newly scoured brass caldron, among a quantity of potato-parings. On the other side of the house Raphael saw a sort of barricade of dead thorn-bushes, meant no doubt to keep the poultry from scratching up the vegetables and pot-herbs. It seemed like the end of the earth. The dwelling was like some bird's-nest ingeniously set in a cranny of the rocks, a clever and at the same time a careless bit of workmanship. A simple and kindly nature lay round about it; its rusticity was genuine, but there was a charm like that of poetry in it; for it grew and throve at a thousand miles' distance from our elaborate and conventional poetry. It was like none of our conceptions; it was a spontaneous growth, a masterpiece due to chance.

As Raphael reached the place, the sunlight fell across it from right to left, bringing out all the colors of its plants and trees; the yellowish or gray bases of the crags, the different shades of the green leaves, the masses of flowers, pink, blue, or white, the climbing plants with their bell-like blossoms, and the shot velvet of the mosses, the purple-tinted blooms of the heather—everything was either brought into relief or made fairer yet by the enchantment of the light or by the contrasting shadows; and this was the case most of all with the sheet of water, wherein the house, the trees, the granite peaks, and the sky were all faithfully reflected. Everything had a radiance of its own in this delightful picture, from the sparkling mica-stone to the bleached tuft of grass hidden away in the soft shadows; the spotted cow with its glossy hide, the delicate water-plants that hung down over the pool like fringes in a nook where blue or emerald-colored insects were buzzing about, the roots of trees like a sand-besprinkled shock of hair above grotesque faces in the flinty rock surface—all these things made a harmony for the eye.

The odor of the tepid water, the scent of the flowers, and the breath of the caverns which filled the lonely place, gave Raphael a sensation that was almost enjoyment. Silence reigned in majesty over these woods, which possibly are

unknown to the tax-collector; but the barking of a couple of dogs broke the stillness all at once; the cows turned their heads toward the entrance of the valley, showing their moist noses to Raphael, stared stupidly at him, and then fell to browsing again. A goat and her kid, that seemed to hang on the side of the crags in some magical fashion, capered and leaped to a slab of granite near to Raphael, and stayed there a moment, as if to seek to know who he was. The yapping of the dogs brought out a plump child, who stood agape, and next came a white-haired old man of middle height. Both of these two beings were in keeping with the surroundings, the air, the flowers, and the dwelling. Health appeared to overflow in this fertile region; old age and childhood thrived there. There seemed to be, about all these types of existence, the freedom and carelessness of the life of primitive times, a happiness of use and wont that gave the lie to our philosophical platitudes, and wrought a cure of all its swelling passions in the heart.

The old man belonged to the type of model dear to the masculine brush of Schnetz. The countless wrinkles upon his brown face looked as if they would be hard to the touch; the straight nose, the prominent cheekbones, streaked with red veins like a vine-leaf in autumn, the angular features, all were characteristics of strength, even where strength existed no longer. The hard hands, now that they toiled no longer, had preserved their scanty white hair; his bearing was that of an absolutely free man; it suggested the thought that, had he been an Italian, he would have perhaps turned brigand, for the love of the liberty so dear to him. The child was a regular mountaineer, with the black eyes that can face the sun without flinching, a deeply tanned complexion, and rough brown hair. His movements were like a bird's—swift, decided, and unconstrained; his clothing was ragged; the white, fair skin showed through the rents in his garments. There they both stood in silence, side by side, both obeying the same impulse; in both faces were clear tokens of an absolutely identical and idle life. The old man had adopted

the child's amusements, and the child had fallen in with the old man's humor; there was a sort of tacit agreement between two kinds of feebleness, between failing powers well-nigh spent and powers just about to unfold themselves.

Very soon a woman who seemed to be about thirty years old appeared on the threshold of the door, spinning as she came. She was an Auvergnate, a high-colored, comfortable-looking, straightforward sort of person, with white teeth; her cap and dress, the face, full figure, and general appearance were of the Auvergne peasant stamp. So was her dialect; she was a thorough embodiment of her district; its hard-working ways, its thrift, ignorance, and heartiness all met in her.

She greeted Raphael, and they began to talk. The dogs quieted down; the old man went and sat on a bench in the sun; the child followed his mother about wherever she went, listening without saying a word, and staring at the stranger.

"You are not afraid to live here, good woman?"

"What should we be afraid of, sir? When we bolt the door, who ever could get inside? Oh, no, we aren't afraid at all. And besides," she said, as she brought the marquis into the principal room in the house, "what should thieves come to take from us here?"

She designated the room as she spoke; the smoke-blackened walls, with some brilliant pictures in blue, red, and green, an "End of Credit," a Crucifixion, and the "Grenadiers of the Imperial Guard" for their sole ornament; the furniture here and there, the old wooden four-post bedstead, the table with crooked legs, a few stools, the chest that held the bread, the flitch that hung from the ceiling, a jar of salt, a stove, and on the mantel-shelf a few discolored yellow plaster figures. As he went out again Raphael noticed a man half-way up the crags, leaning on a hoe, and watching the house with interest.

"That's my man, sir," said the Auvergnate, unconsciously smiling in peasant fashion; "he is at work up there."

"And that old man is your father?"

"Asking your pardon, sir, he is my man's grandfather. Such as you see him, he is a hundred and two, and yet quite lately he walked over to Clermont with our little chap! Oh, he has been a strong man in his time; but he does nothing now but sleep and eat and drink. He amuses himself with the little fellow. Sometimes the child trails him up the hillsides, and he will just go up there along with him."

Valentin made up his mind immediately. He would live between this child and old man, breathe the same air, eat their bread, drink the same water, sleep with them, make the blood in his veins like theirs. It was a dying man's fancy. For him the prime model, after which the customary existence of the individual should be shaped, the real formula for the life of a human being, the only true and possible life, the life-ideal, was to become one of the oysters adhering to this rock, to save his shell a day or two longer by paralyzing the power of death. One profoundly selfish thought took possession of him, and the whole universe was swallowed up and lost in it. For him the universe existed no longer; the whole world had come to be within himself. For the sick, the world begins at their pillow and ends at the foot of the bed; and this countryside was Raphael's sickbed.

Who has not, at some time or other in his life, watched the comings and goings of an ant, slipped straws into a yellow slug's one breathing-hole, studied the vagaries of a slender dragon-fly, pondered admiringly over the countless veins in an oak-leaf, that bring the colors of a rose window in some Gothic cathedral into contrast with the reddish background? Who has not looked long in delight at the effects of sun and rain on a roof of brown tiles, at the dewdrops, or at the variously shaped petals of the flower-cups? Who has not sunk into these idle, absorbing meditations on things without, that have no conscious end, yet lead to some definite thought at last? Who, in short, has not led a lazy life, the life of childhood, the life of the savage without his labor? This

life without a care or a wish, Raphael led for some days' space. He felt a distinct improvement in his condition, a wonderful sense of ease, that quieted his apprehensions and soothed his sufferings.

He would climb the crags, and then find a seat high up on some peak whence he could see a vast expanse of distant country at a glance, and he would spend whole days in this way, like a plant in the sun, or a hare in its form. And at last, growing familiar with the appearances of the plant-life about him, and of the changes in the sky, he minutely noted the progress of everything working around him in the water, on the earth, or in the air. He tried to share the secret impulses of nature, sought by passive obedience to become a part of it, and to lie within the conservative and despotic jurisdiction that regulates instinctive existence. He no longer wished to steer his own course.

Just as criminals in olden times were safe from the pursuit of justice, if they took refuge under the shadow of the altar, so Raphael made an effort to slip into the sanctuary of life. He succeeded in becoming an integral part of the great and mighty fruit-producing organization; he had adapted himself to the inclemency of the air, and had dwelt in every cave among the rocks. He had learned the ways and habits of growth of every plant, had studied the laws of the water courses and their beds, and had come to know the animals; he was at last so perfectly at one with this teeming earth, that he had in some sort discerned its mysteries and caught the spirit of it.

The infinitely varied forms of every natural kingdom were, to his thinking, only developments of one and the same substance, different combinations brought about by the same impulse, endless emanations from a measureless Being which was acting, thinking, moving, and growing, and in harmony with which he longed to grow, to move, to think, and act. He had fancifully blended his life with the life of the crags; he had deliberately planted himself there. During the earliest days of his sojourn in these pleasant sur-

roundings, Valentin tasted all the pleasures of childhood again, thanks to the strange hallucination of apparent convalescence, which is not unlike the pauses of delirium that nature mercifully provides for those in pain. He went about making trifling discoveries, setting to work on endless things, and finishing none of them; the evening's plans were quite forgotten in the morning; he had no cares, he was happy; he thought himself saved.

One morning he had lain in bed till noon, deep in the dreams between sleep and waking, which give to realities a fantastic appearance, and make the wildest fancies seem solid facts; while he was still uncertain that he was not dreaming yet, he suddenly heard his hostess giving a report of his health to Jonathan, for the first time. Jonathan came to inquire after him daily; and the Auvergnate, thinking no doubt that Valentin was still asleep, had not lowered the tones of a voice developed in mountain air.

"No better and no worse," she said. "He coughed all last night again fit to kill himself. Poor gentleman, he coughs and spits till it is piteous. My husband and I often wonder to each other where he gets the strength from to cough like that. It goes to your heart. What a cursed complaint it is! He has no strength at all. I am always afraid I shall find him dead in his bed some morning. He is every bit as pale as a waxen Christ. *Dame!* I watch him while he dresses; his poor body is as thin as a nail. And he does not feel well now; but no matter. It's all the same; he wears himself out with running about as if he had health and to spare. All the same, he is very brave, for he never complains at all. But really he would be better under the earth than on it, for he is enduring the agonies of Christ. I don't wish that myself, sir; it is quite against our interests; but even if he didn't pay us what he does, I should be just as fond of him; it is not our own interest that is our motive.

"Ah, mon Dieu!" she continued, "Parisians are the people for these dogs' diseases. Where did he catch it,

now? Poor young man! And he is so sure that he is going to get well! That fever just gnaws him, you know; it eats him away; it will be the death of him. He has no notion whatever of that; he does not know it, sir; he sees nothing—You mustn't cry about him, M. Jonathan; you must remember that he will be happy, and will not suffer any more. You ought to make a *neuvaine* for him; I have seen wonderful cures come of a nine days' prayer, and I would gladly pay for a wax taper to save such a gentle creature, so good he is, a paschal lamb—"

As Raphael's voice had grown too weak to allow him to make himself heard, he was compelled to listen to this horrible loquacity. His irritation, however, drove him out of bed at length, and he appeared upon the threshold.

"Old scoundrel!" he shouted to Jonathan; "do you mean to put me to death?"

The peasant woman took him for a ghost, and fled.

"I forbid you to have any anxiety whatever about my health," Raphael went on.

"Yes, my Lord Marquis," said the old servant, wiping away his tears.

"And for the future you had very much better not come here without my orders."

Jonathan meant to be obedient, but in the look full of pity and devotion that he gave the marquis before he went, Raphael read his own death-warrant. Utterly disheartened, brought all at once to a sense of his real position, Valentin sat down on the threshold, locked his arms across his chest, and bowed his head. Jonathan turned to his master in alarm, with "My lord—"

"Go away, go away," cried the invalid.

In the hours of the next morning, Raphael climbed the crags, and sat down in a mossy cleft in the rocks, whence he could see the narrow path along which the water for the dwelling was carried. At the base of the hill he saw Jonathan in conversation with the Auvergnate. Some malicious power interpreted for him all the woman's head-shakings,

melancholy gestures, and garrulous forebodings, and filled the breeze and the silence with her ominous words. Thrilled with horror, he took refuge among the highest summits of the mountains, and stayed there till the evening; but yet he could not drive away the gloomy presentiments awakened within him in such an unfortunate manner by a cruel solicitude on his account.

The Auvergne peasant herself suddenly appeared before him like a shadow in the dusk; a perverse freak of the poet within him found a vague resemblance between her black and white striped petticoat and the bony frame of a spectre.

"The damp is falling now, sir," said she. "If you stop out there you will go off just like rotten fruit. You must come in. It isn't healthy to breathe the damp, and you have taken nothing since the morning, besides."

"*Tonnerre de Dieu!* old witch," he cried: "let me live after my own fashion, I tell you, or I shall be off altogether. It is quite bad enough to dig my grave every morning; you might let it alone in the evenings at least—"

"Your grave, sir! I dig your grave!—and where may your grave be? I want to see you as old as father there, and not in your grave by any manner of means. The grave! that comes soon enough for us all; in the grave—"

"That is enough," said Raphael.

"Take my arm, sir."

"No."

The feeling of pity in others is very difficult for a man to bear, and it is hardest of all when the pity is deserved. Hatred is a tonic—it quickens life and stimulates revenge; but pity is death to us—it makes our weakness weaker still. It is as if distress simpered ingratiatingly at us; contempt lurks in the tenderness, or tenderness in an affront. In the centenarian Raphael saw triumphant pity, a wondering pity in the child's eyes, an officious pity in the woman, and in her husband a pity that had an interested motive; but no matter how the sentiment declared itself, death was always its import.

A poet makes a poem of everything; it is tragical or

joyful, as things happen to strike his imagination; his lofty soul rejects all half-tones; he always prefers vivid and decided colors. In Raphael's soul this compassion produced a terrible poem of mourning and melancholy. When he had wished to live in close contact with nature, he had of course forgotten how freely natural emotions are expressed. He would think himself quite alone under a tree, while he struggled with an obstinate coughing fit, a terrible combat from which he never issued victorious without utter exhaustion afterward; and then he would meet the clear, bright eyes of the little boy, who occupied the post of sentinel, like a savage in a bent of grass; the eyes scrutinized him with a childish wonder, in which there was as much amusement as pleasure, and an indescribable mixture of indifference and interest. The awful *Brother, you must die*, of the Trappists seemed constantly legible in the eyes of the peasants with whom Raphael was living; he scarcely knew which he dreaded most, their unfettered talk or their silence; their presence became torture.

One morning he saw two men in black prowling about in his neighborhood, who furtively studied him and took observations. They made as though they had come there for a stroll, and asked him a few indifferent questions, to which he returned short answers. He recognized them both. One was the curé and the other the doctor at the springs; Jonathan had no doubt sent them, or the people in the house had called them in, or the scent of an approaching death had drawn them thither. He beheld his own funeral, heard the chanting of the priests, and counted the tall wax candles; and all that lovely fertile nature around him, in whose lap he had thought to find life once more, he saw no longer, save through a veil of crape. Everything that but lately had spoken of length of days to him now prophesied a speedy end. He set out the next day for Paris, not before he had been inundated with cordial wishes, which the people of the house uttered in melancholy and wistful tones for his benefit.

He travelled through the night, and awoke as they passed through one of the pleasant valleys of the Bourbonnais. View after view swam before his gaze, and passed rapidly away like the vague pictures of a dream. Cruel nature spread herself out before his eyes with tantalizing grace. Some times the Allier, a liquid shining ribbon, meandered through the distant fertile landscape; then followed the steeples of hamlets, hiding modestly in the depths of a ravine with its yellow cliffs; sometimes, after the monotony of vineyards, the water-mills of a little valley would be suddenly seen; and everywhere there were pleasant chateaux, hillside villages, roads with their fringes of queenly poplars; and the Loire itself, at last, with its wide sheets of water sparkling like diamonds amid its golden sands. Attractions everywhere, without end! This nature, all astir with a life and gladness like that of childhood, scarcely able to contain the impulses and sap of June, possessed a fatal attraction for the darkened gaze of the invalid. He drew the blinds of his carriage windows, and betook himself again to slumber.

Toward evening, after they had passed Cesne, he was awakened by lively music, and found himself confronted with a village fair. The horses were changed near the market-place. While the postilions were engaged in making the transfer, he saw the people dancing merrily, pretty and attractive girls with flowers about them, excited youths, and finally the jolly wine-flushed countenances of old peasants. Children prattled, old women laughed and chatted; everything spoke in one voice, and there was a holiday gayety about everything, down to their clothing and the tables that were set out. A cheerful expression pervaded the square and the church, the roofs and windows; even the very doorways of the village seemed likewise to be in holiday trim.

Raphael could not repress an angry exclamation, nor yet a wish to silence the fiddles, annihilate the stir and bustle, stop the clamor, and disperse the ill-timed festival; like a

dying man, he felt unable to endure the slightest sound, and he entered his carriage much annoyed. When he looked out upon the square from the window, he saw that all the happiness was scared away; the peasant women were in flight, and the benches were deserted. Only a blind musician, on the scaffolding of the orchestra, went on playing a shrill tune on his clarinet. That piping of his, without dancers to it, and the solitary old man himself, in the shadow of the lime-tree, with his curmudgeon's face, scanty hair, and ragged clothing, was like a fantastic picture of Raphael's wish. The heavy rain was pouring in torrents; it was one of those thunderstorms that June brings about so rapidly, to cease as suddenly. The thing was so natural, that, when Raphael had looked out and seen some pale clouds driven over by a gust of wind, he did not think of looking at the piece of skin. He lay back again in the corner of his carriage, which was very soon rolling upon its way.

The next day found him back in his home again, in his own room, beside his own fireside. He had had a large fire lighted; he felt cold. Jonathan brought him some letters; they were all from Pauline. He opened the first one without any eagerness, and unfolded it as if it had been the gray-paper form of application for taxes made by the revenue collector. He read the first sentence:

"Gone! This really is a flight, my Raphael. How is it? No one can tell me where you are. And who should know if not I?"

He did not wish to learn any more. He calmly took up the letters and threw them in the fire, watching with dull and lifeless eyes the perfumed paper as it was twisted, shrivelled, bent, and devoured by the capricious flames. Fragments that fell among the ashes allowed him to see the beginning of a sentence, or a half-burned thought or word; he took a pleasure in deciphering them—a sort of mechanical amusement.

"Sitting at your door—expected—Caprice—I obey—Rivals—I, never!—thy Pauline—love—no more of Pau-

line?—If you had wished to leave me forever, you would not have deserted me—Love eternal—To die—"

The words caused him a sort of remorse; he seized the tongs, and rescued a last fragment of the letter from the flames.

"I have murmured," so Pauline wrote, "but I have never complained, my Raphael! If you have left me so far behind you, it was doubtless because you wished to hide some heavy grief from me. Perhaps you will kill me one of these days, but you are too good to torture me. So do not go away from me like this. There! I can bear the worst of torment, if only I am at your side. Any grief that you could cause me would not be grief. There is far more love in my heart for you than I have ever yet shown you. I can endure anything, except this weeping far away from you, this ignorance of your—"

Raphael laid the scorched scrap on the mantelpiece, then all at once he flung it into the fire. The bit of paper was too clearly a symbol of his own love and luckless existence.

"Go and find M. Bianchon," he told Jonathan.

Horace came and found Raphael in bed.

"Can you prescribe a draught for me—some mild opiate which will always keep me in a somnolent condition, a draught that will not be injurious although taken constantly."

"Nothing is easier," the young doctor replied; "but you will have to keep on your feet for a few hours daily, at any rate, so as to take your food."

"A few hours!" Raphael broke in; "no, no! I only wish to be out of bed for an hour at most."

"What is your object?" inquired Bianchon.

"To sleep; for so one keeps alive, at any rate," the patient answered. "Let no one come in, not even Mlle. Pauline de Vitschnau!" he added to Jonathan, as the doctor was writing out his prescription.

"Well, M. Horace, is there any hope?" the old servant

asked, going as far as the flight of steps before the door with the young doctor.

"He may live for some time yet, or he may die to-night. The chances of life and death are evenly balanced in his case. I can't understand it at all," said the doctor, with a doubtful gesture. "His mind ought to be diverted."

"Diverted! Ah, sir, you don't know him! He killed a man the other day without a word!—Nothing can divert him!"

For some days Raphael lay plunged in the torpor of this artificial sleep. Thanks to the material power that opium exerts over the immaterial part of us, this man with the powerful and active imagination reduced himself to the level of those sluggish forms of animal life that lurk in the depths of forests, and take the form of vegetable refuse, never stirring from their place to catch their easy prey. He had darkened the very sun in heaven; the daylight never entered his room. About eight o'clock in the evening he would leave his bed, with no very clear consciousness of his own existence; he would satisfy the claims of hunger and return to bed immediately. One dull blighted hour after another only brought confused pictures and appearances before him, and lights and shadows against a background of darkness. He lay buried in deep silence; movement and intelligence were completely annihilated for him. He woke later than usual one evening, and found that his dinner was not ready. He rang for Jonathan.

"You can go," he said. "I have made you rich; you shall be happy in your old age; but I will not let you muddle away my life any longer. Miserable wretch! I am hungry—where is my dinner? How is it?—Answer me!"

A satisfied smile stole over Jonathan's face. He took a candle that lighted up the great dark rooms of the mansion with its flickering light; brought his master, who had again become an automaton, into a great gallery, and flung a door suddenly open. Raphael was all at once dazzled by a flood of light and amazed by an unheard-of scene.

His chandeliers had been filled with wax-lights; the rarest flowers from his conservatory were carefully arranged about the room; the table sparkled with silver, gold, crystal, and porcelain; a royal banquet was spread—the odors of the tempting dishes tickled the nervous fibres of the palate. There sat his friends; he saw them among beautiful women in full evening dress, with bare necks and shoulders, with flowers in their hair; fair women of every type, with sparkling eyes, attractively and fancifully arrayed. One had adopted an Irish jacket, which displayed the alluring outlines of her form; one wore the "basquina" of Andalusia, with its wanton grace; here was a half-clad Diana the huntress, there the costume of Mlle. de la Vallière, amorous and coy; and all of them alike were given up to the intoxication of the moment.

As Raphael's death-pale face showed itself in the doorway, a sudden outcry broke out, as vehement as the blaze of this improvised banquet. The voices, perfumes, and lights, the exquisite beauty of the women, produced their effect upon his senses, and awakened his desires. Delightful music, from unseen players in the next room, drowned the excited tumult in a torrent of harmony—the whole strange vision was complete.

Raphael felt a caressing pressure of his own hand, a woman's white, youthful arms were stretched out to grasp him, and the hand was Aquilina's. He knew now that this scene was not a fantastic illusion like the fleeting pictures of his disordered dreams; he uttered a dreadful cry, slammed the door, and dealt his heartbroken old servant a blow in the face.

"Monster!" he cried, "so you have sworn to kill me!" and trembling at the risks he had just now run, he summoned all his energies, reached his room, took a powerful sleeping draught, and went to bed.

"The devil!" cried Jonathan, recovering himself. "And M. Bianchon most certainly told me to divert his mind."

It was close upon midnight. By that time, owing to one

of those physical caprices that are the marvel and the despair of science, Raphael, in his slumber, became radiant with beauty. A bright color glowed on his pale cheeks. There was an almost girlish grace about the forehead in which his genius was revealed. Life seemed to bloom on the quiet face that lay there at rest. His sleep was sound; a light, even breath was drawn in between the red lips; he was smiling—he had passed no doubt through the gate of dreams into a noble life. Was he a centenarian now? Did his grandchildren come to wish him length of days? Or, on a rustic bench set in the sun and under the trees, was he scanning, like the prophet on the mountain heights, a promised land, a far-off time of blessing.

"Here you are!"

The words, uttered in silver tones, dispelled the shadowy faces of his dreams. He saw Pauline, in the lamplight, sitting upon the bed; Pauline grown fairer yet through sorrow and separation. Raphael remained bewildered by the sight of her face, white as the petals of some water flower, and the shadow of her long, dark hair about it seemed to make it whiter still. Her tears had left a gleaming trace upon her cheeks, and hung there yet, ready to fall at the least movement. She looked like an angel fallen from the skies, or a spirit that a breath might waft away, as she sat there all in white, with her head bowed, scarcely creasing the quilt beneath her weight.

"Ah, I have forgotten everything!" she cried, as Raphael opened his eyes. "I have no voice left except to tell you, 'I am yours.' There is nothing in my heart but love. Angel of my life, you have never been so beautiful before! Your eyes are blazing— But come, I can guess it all. You have been in search of health without me; you were afraid of me —well—"

"Go! go! leave me," Raphael muttered at last. "Why do you not go? If you stay, I shall die. Do you want to see me die?"

"Die?" she echoed. "Can you die without me? Die?

But you are young; and I love you! Die?" she asked, in a deep, hollow voice. She seized his hands with a frenzied movement. "Cold!" she wailed. "Is it all an illusion?"

Raphael drew the little bit of skin from under his pillow; it was as tiny and as fragile as a periwinkle-petal. He showed it to her.

"Pauline!" he said, "fair image of my fair life, let us say good-by."

"Good-by?" she echoed, looking surprised.

"Yes. This is a talisman that grants all my wishes, and that represents my span of life. See here, this is all that remains of it. If you look at me any longer, I shall die—"

The young girl thought that Valentin had grown light-headed; she took the talisman and went to fetch the lamp. By its tremulous light which she shed over Raphael and the talisman, she scanned her lover's face and the last morsel of the magic skin. As Pauline stood there, in all the beauty of love and terror, Raphael was no longer able to control his thoughts; memories of tender scenes, and of passionate and fevered joys, overwhelmed the soul that had so long lain dormant within him, and kindled a fire not quite extinct.

"Pauline! Pauline! Come to me—"

A dreadful cry came from the girl's throat, her eyes dilated with horror, her eyebrows were distorted and drawn apart by an unspeakable anguish; she read in Raphael's eyes the vehement desire in which she had once exulted, but as it grew she felt a light movement in her hand, and the skin contracted. She did not stop to think; she fled into the next room, and locked the door.

"Pauline! Pauline!" cried the dying man, as he rushed after her; "I love you, I adore you, I want you, Pauline! I must curse you if you will not open the door for me. I wish to die in your arms!"

With unnatural strength, the last effort of ebbing life, he broke down the door, and saw his mistress writhing upon a sofa. Pauline had vainly tried to pierce her heart, and

now thought to find a rapid death by strangling herself with her shawl.

"If I die, he will live," she said, trying to tighten the knot that she had made.

In her struggle with death her hair hung loose, her shoulders were bare, her clothing was disordered, her eyes were bathed in tears, her face was flushed and drawn with the horror of despair; yet as her exceeding beauty met Raphael's intoxicated eyes, his delirium grew. He sprang toward her like a bird of prey, tore away the shawl, and tried to take her in his arms.

The dying man sought for words to express the wish that was consuming his strength; but no sounds would come except the choking death-rattle in his chest. Each breath he drew sounded hollower than the last, and seemed to come from his very entrails. At the last moment, no longer able to utter a sound, he set his teeth in Pauline's breast. Jonathan appeared, terrified by the cries he had heard, and tried to tear away the dead body from the grasp of the girl who was crouching with it in a corner.

"What do you want?" she asked. "He is mine, I have killed him. Did I not foresee how it would be?"

EPILOGUE

"And what became of Pauline?"

"Pauline? Ah! Do you sometimes spend a pleasant winter evening by your own fireside, and give yourself up luxuriously to memories of love or youth, while you watch the glow of the fire where the logs of oak are burning? Here, the fire outlines a sort of chessboard in red squares, there it has a sheen like velvet; little blue flames start up and flicker and play about in the glowing depths of the brasier. A mysterious artist comes and adapts that flame to his own ends; by a secret of his own he draws a visionary face in the midst of those flaming violet and crimson hues, a face with unimaginable delicate outlines, a fleeting apparition

which no chance will ever bring back again. It is a woman's face, her hair is blown back by the wind, her features speak of a rapture of delight; she breathes fire in the midst of the fire. She smiles, she dies, you will never see her any more. Farewell, flower of the flame! Farewell, essence incomplete and unforeseen, come too early or too late to make the spark of some glorious diamond."

"But, Pauline?"

"You do not see, then? I will begin again. Make way! make way! She comes, she is here, the queen of illusions, a woman fleeting as a kiss, a woman bright as lightning, issuing in a blaze like lightning from the sky, a being uncreated, of spirit and love alone. She has wrapped her shadowy form in flame, or perhaps the flame betokens that she exists but for a moment. The pure outlines of her shape tell you that she comes from heaven. Is she not radiant as an angel? Can you not hear the beating of her wings in space? She sinks down beside you more lightly than a bird, and you are entranced by her awful eyes; there is a magical power in her light breathing that draws your lips to hers; she flies and you follow; you feel the earth beneath you no longer. If you could but once touch that form of snow with your eager, deluded hands, once twine the golden hair round your fingers, place one kiss on those shining eyes! There is an intoxicating vapor around, and the spell of a siren music is upon you. Every nerve in you is quivering; you are filled with pain and longing. Oh, joy for which there is no name! You have touched the woman's lips, and you are wakened at once by a horrible pang. Oh! ah! yes, you have struck your head against the corner of the bedpost, you have been clasping its brown mahogany sides, and chilly gilt ornaments; embracing a piece of metal, a brazen Cupid."

"But how about Pauline, sir?"

"What, again? Listen. One lovely morning at Tours a young man, who held the hand of a pretty woman in his, went on board the 'Ville d'Angers.' Thus united they

both looked and wondered long at a white form that rose elusively out of the mists above the broad waters of the Loire, like some child of the sun and the river, or some freak of air and cloud. This translucent form was a sylph or a naiad by turns; she hovered in the air like a word that haunts the memory, which seeks in vain to grasp it; she glided among the islands, she nodded her head here and there among the tall poplar trees; then she grew to a giant's height; she shook out the countless folds of her drapery to the light, she shot light from the aureole that the sun had litten about her face; she hovered above the slopes of the hills and their little hamlets, and seemed to bar the passage of the boat before the Chateau d'Ussé. You might have thought that *La dame des belles cousines* sought to protect her country from modern intrusion."

"Well, well, I understand. So it went with Pauline. But how about Fœdora?"

"Oh! Fœdora, you are sure to meet with her! She was at the Bouffons last night, and she will go to the Opera this evening, and if you like to take it so, she is Society."

THE QUEST OF THE ABSOLUTE

PREFACE

THE VOLUME of the old edition of the "Comédie Humaine," which opened with "La Recherche de l'Absolu," together with that generally entitled "Les Marana," contains the cream and flower of Balzac as a story-teller; and the first excels the second in showing the fiery heat and glow of the author's imagination. Its principal constituent, the title story, is large enough for a novel by itself, and is so given here. The chief of the minor elements, "Le Chef-d'œuvre inconnu," has seemed to some the actual masterpiece of the author. "Jésus-Christ en Flandre," like some others of Balzac's short stories, intimates an intention in him of emulating the *contes fantastiques*, half-humorous and half-romantic, half-Voltairean and half-mystical, which were so much in favor in 1830. It is, I think, quite the best of them, and it shows its author's great manner in more points than one. But just as at the end of "L'Elixir de longue Vie" we want the touch of Hoffmann rather than that of Balzac; so here we find something that is not quite perfect, that wants another hand. Even as it is, we would not change for anything else, but we have the sense that the same thing by another person might have been even better. "Melmoth réconcilié," an inferior thing in itself, has in the same way a sort of special and adventitious interest.

But "La Recherche de l'Absolu" is, as has been said, a novel in itself. Taking minor points only, it is a masterpiece. That there is a certain parallelism, probably un-

conscious, between the way in which Balthazar Claes as unconsciously kills his wife and the way in which Monsieur Grandet kills his, is certainly no drawback to the book; for the repetition, if it is a repetition, only shows how genius can repeat. Indeed, there is the same demonstration contained in the same books in the representation of the diverse martyrdoms of Madame Claes and her daughter Marguerite, fatal in the former case, happily changed in the latter. In no book is Balzac's faculty of Dutch drawing, as far as scenes and details go, more brilliantly shown; in none are the minor characters—from the *famulus* Lemulquinier, with his fatal belief in his master's madness, downward—better; while Marguerite Claes and her mother, especially Marguerite, are by common consent to be ranked among Balzac's greatest triumphs in portraying "honest women."

But these things, though they illustrate the general principle that the presence of a great central interest and figure will radiate greatness and interest on its surroundings, would contribute comparatively little to the effect of the book if it were not for the Seeker after the Absolute himself. Nowhere, perhaps, has the hopeless tyranny of the fixed idea, the ferocious (not exactly selfish) absorption in the pursuit of a craze, been portrayed with quite the same power as here. And we know and feel that the energy, the fire, the perfection of the handling are due to sympathy—that Balzac a few generations earlier would have sought the Philosopher's Stone with the same desperate energy as Balthazar. Probably nothing but his prior attachment to literary work prevented him from doing something similar; while actually, and as it was, he kept himself in lifelong difficulties by no very different persistence in the corresponding, if more ignoble, Game of Speculation.

I have just said that the tyranny of the ideal has nowhere been more successfully portrayed than in "La Recherche de l'Absolu"; but there is perhaps one exception, and it is "Le Chef-d'œuvre inconnu," which should be carefully compared with the larger fiction. The attraction of this wonderful and terrible piece for all who have anything to do with the things of the spirit, whether in the way of criticism or in the way of creation, can hardly be exaggerated. I remember many years ago spending half an evening in discussing, in a sort of amœbean strain, its merits with the late Mr. Stevenson; and everybody knows the compliment which a distinguished American writer has paid it by attempting a sort of paraphrase of its original. The same interest is present here and in "La Recherche," but it is a little complicated, a little refined upon. Here, too, there is the sorcery of the ideal, the frenzied passion for attainment and perfection. But here there is a special *nuance* almost as closely connected with Balzac's individuality as the general scheme. We know that the mania of constant retouching, of adding strokes, was a danger of his own; that he did actually indulge in it to an extent very prejudicial to his pecuniary interest, and perhaps not always advantageous to the effect of his work, though the artist in words is hardly exposed to any such absolutely hopeless catastrophe in such a case as is the artist in line and color.

Yet, wonderful as this is, it cannot in its limited space, and with its intensely concentrated interest, vie with the amplitude, the variety, the dignity of the "Recherche." Balzac might have made this too long: he was not always proof against that temptation. But in it, as in "Eugénie Grandet," with which it has been already compared, he has hit the exact mean between a short tale and a long novel, has not sinned

by digression and episode, has hardly sinned by undue indulgence in detail. The interest is perhaps remoter from the general human understanding than that of "Eugénie" and one or two others. But it is handled with equal mastery, and the effect is at least equally good.

It is not, of course, that a knowledge of Balzac's own peculiarities adds anything to the sense of the artistic eminence of these two stories. That would be clear if we knew nothing whatever about the other part of the matter. But it cannot be regarded as uninteresting that we should thus know the secret of the *furia*, the "nobler gust" of sympathy and enjoyment with which the writer, consciously or unconsciously, must have set about these two great, and in his own work, almost incomparable things.

"La Recherche de l'Absolu" appeared in 1834, with seven chapter-divisions, as a "Scène de la vie privée"; was published by itself in 1839 by Charpentier; and took its final place as a part of the "Comédie" in 1845.

A WOMAN WAS SITTING IN A LARGE EASY CHAIR BY ONE OF THE WINDOWS

Balzac, vol. twenty-one—In Quest of the Absolute

THE QUEST OF THE ABSOLUTE

TO MADAME JOSEPHINE DELANNOY, NÉE DOUMERC

Madame, may God grant that this, my book, may live longer than I, for then the gratitude which I owe to you, and which I hope will equal your almost maternal kindness to me, would last beyond the limits prescribed for human affection. This sublime privilege of prolonging the life in our hearts for a time by the life of the work we leave behind us would be (if we could only be sure of gaining it at last) a reward indeed for all the labor undertaken by those who aspire to such an immortality. Yet again I say—May God grant it!

De Balzac

THERE IS IN DOUAI, in the Rue de Paris, a house that may be singled out from all others in the city; for in every respect, in its outward appearance, in its interior arrangements, and in every detail, it is a perfect example of an old Flemish building, and preserves all the characteristics of a quaint style of domestic architecture thoroughly in keeping with the patriarchal manners of the good folk in the Low Countries. But before proceeding to describe the house, it may not be wholly unnecessary here to enter, on behalf of authors, a protest in favor of those didactic preliminaries for which the ignorant and impatient reader has so strong a dislike. There are persons who crave sensations, yet have not patience to submit to the influences which produce them; who would fain have flowers without the seed, the child without gestation. Art, it would seem, is to accomplish what nature cannot.

It so happens that human life in all its aspects, wide or narrow, is so intimately connected with architecture, that

with a certain amount of observation we can usually reconstruct a bygone society from the remains of its public monuments. From relics of household stuff, we can imagine its owners "in their habit as they lived." Archeology, in fact, is to the body social somewhat as comparative anatomy is to animal organizations. A complete social system is made clear to us by a bit of mosaic, just as a whole past order of things is implied by the skeleton of an ichthyosaurus. Beholding the cause, we guess the effect, even as we proceed from the effect to the cause, one deduction following another until a chain of evidence is complete, until the man of science raises up a whole bygone world from the dead, and discovers for us not only the features of the Past, but even the warts upon those features.

Hence, no doubt, the prodigious interest which people take in descriptions of architecture so long as the writer keeps his own idiosyncrasies out of the text and does not obscure the facts with theories of his own; for every one, by a simple process of deduction, can call up the past for himself as he reads. Human experience varies so little that the past seems strangely like the present; and when we learn what has been, it not seldom happens that we also behold plainly what shall be again. As a matter of fact, we can seldom see a picture or a description of any place wherein the current of human life has once flowed, without being put in mind of our own personal experience, our broken resolutions, or our blossoming hopes; and the contrast between the present, in which our heart's desire is never given to us, and the future, when our wishes may be fulfilled, is an inexhaustible source of melancholy or delightful musings. How is it that Flemish art, with its pictures of Flemish life, makes an almost irresistible appeal to our feelings whenever the little details are faithfully rendered? Perhaps the secret of the charm lies in this—that there seems less uncertainty and perplexity in this matter-of-fact life than in any other. Such art could hardly exist without the opulent comfort which comes of a prosperity of long use and wont; it depicts an

existence peaceful to the verge of beatitude, with all its complicated family ties and domestic festivals; but it is no less the expression of a tranquility wellnigh monotonous, of a prosperity which frankly finds its happiness in self-indulgence, which has nothing left to wish for, because its every desire is gratified as soon as it is formed. Even passionate temperaments, that measure the force of life by the tumult of the soul, cannot see these placid pictures and feel unmoved; it is only shallow people who think that because the pulse beats so steadily the heart is cold.

The energy that expends itself in a sudden and violent outbreak produces a far greater effect on the popular imagination than an equal force exerted slowly and persistently. The crowd have neither the time nor the patience to estimate an enormous power which is uniformly exerted; they do not reflect on appearances; they are borne too swiftly along the current of life; it is therefore only transcendent passion that makes any impression upon them, and the great artist is most extolled when he exceeds the limits of perfection: Michelangelo, Bianca Cappello, Mademoiselle de la Vallière, Beethoven, Paganini—you may pass their names in review. It is only a rare and great power which knows that there must be no overstepping of the limit line, that sets in the first place that quality of symmetry, that completeness which stamps a perfect work of art with the profound repose which has so strong a charm for those who are capable of recognizing it. But the life adopted by this practical people is in all respects the ideal life of the citizen as conceived of by the lower classes; it is a bourgeois paradise in which nothing is lacking to fill the measure of their felicity.

A highly refined materialism is the distinguishing characteristic of Flemish life. There is something dull, dreary, and unimaginative about English "comfort"; but a Flemish interior, with its glowing colors, is a delight to the eyes, and there is a blithe simplicity about the homeliness of Flemish life; evidently the burden of toil is not too heavily felt, and the tobacco-pipe shows that the Flemings have grasped and

applied the Neapolitan doctrine of *far niente*, while a tranquil appreciation of art and beauty in their surroundings is no less evident. In the temper of the people, indeed, there are two of the most essential conditions for the cultivation of art: patience, and that capacity for taking pains which is necessary if the work of the artist is to live; these are preeminently the characteristics of the patient and painstaking Fleming. The magical splendor, the subtle beauty of poetry, are attainments impossible for patience and conscientiousness, you think? Their life in Flanders must be as monotonously level as the lowlands of Holland, and as dreary as their clouded skies! But it is nothing of the kind. The power of civilization has been brought to bear in every direction—even the effects of the climate have been modified.

If you notice the differences between the products of various parts of the globe, it surprises you at first that the prevailing tints of the temperate zones should be grays and tawny-browns, while the brilliant colors are confined to tropical regions—a natural law which applies no less to habits of life. But Flanders, with her naturally brown and sober hues, has learned how to brighten the naturally foggy and sullen atmosphere in the course of many a political revolution. From her old lords, the Dukes of Burgundy, she passed to the Kings of Spain and France; she has been forced to seek allies in Holland and in Germany, and Flemish life bears witness to all these changes. There are traces of Spanish dominion in their lavish use of scarlet, of lustrous satins, in the bold designs of their tapestry, in their drooping feathers and mandolins, in their stately and ceremonious customs. From Venice, in exchange for their linen and laces, they received the glasses of fantastic form in which the wine seems to glow with a richer color. From Austria they received the tradition of the grave and deliberate diplomacy which, to quote the popular adage, "made three steps in a bushel basket."

Their trade with the Indies has brought them in abundance the grotesque inventions of China and the marvels

of Japan. But with all their receptiveness, their power of absorbing everything, of giving out nothing, and of patiently enduring any yoke, Flanders could hardly be regarded as anything but a European curiosity shop, a mere confusion of nationalities, until the discovery of tobacco inaugurated a new era. Then the national character was fused and formed out of all these scattered elements, and the features of the first Fleming looked forth at last upon the world through a cloud of tobacco-smoke. Ever since that time—no matter for their frontiers and their lands divided piecemeal—there is no question of the solidarity of the Flemings; they are one nation, thanks to the tankard and the tobacco-pipe.

So Flanders, with its practical turn, has constantly assimilated the intellectual and material wealth of its masters and neighbors, until the country, originally so dreary and unromantic, has recast its life on a model of its own choosing, acquiring the habits and manners best suited to the Flemish temperament without apparently losing its own individuality or independence. The art of Flanders, for instance, did not strive after ideal forms; it was content to reproduce the real as it had never been reproduced before. It is useless to ask this country of monumental poetry for the verve of comedy, for dramatic action, for musical genius, for the bolder flights of the epic or the ode; its bent is rather for experimental science, for lengthy disputations, for work that demands time, and smells somewhat of the lamp. All their researches are of a practical kind, and must conduce to physical wellbeing. They look at facts and see nothing beyond them; thought must bear the yoke and be subservient to the needs of life; it must occupy itself with realities, and never soar above or beyond them. Their sole conception of a national career was a sort of political thrift, their force in insurrection was the outcome of an energetic desire to have sufficient elbow-room at table and to take their ease beneath the eaves of their *steedes*.

It was this love of comfort, together with the independent attitude of mind which is a result of prosperity, that

led them first to feel that desire for liberty which, later on, was to set all Europe in a ferment. Moreover, there is a dogged tenacity about a Fleming and a fixity of idea which makes him grow dangerous in the defence of his rights. They are a thorough people; and whether it is a question of architecture or furniture, of dikes or agriculture or insurrection, they never do things by halves. No one can approach them in anything they set themselves to do. The manufacture of lace, involving the patient cultivation of flax and the still more patient labor of the worker, together with the industry of the linen weaver, have been the sources of their wealth from one generation to another.

If you wished to paint Stability incarnate, perhaps you could not do better than take some good burgomaster of the Low Countries for model; a man not lacking in heroism, and, as has often been seen, ready to die in his citizen fashion an obscure death for the rights of his Hansa.

But the grace and poetry of this patriarchal existence is naturally revealed in a description of one of the last remaining houses, which at the time when this story begins still preserved the traditions and the characteristics of that life in Douai.

Of all places in the department of the Nord, Douai (alas!) is the town which is being modernized most rapidly; modern innovations are bringing about a revolution there. Old buildings are disappearing day by day, old-world ways are almost forgotten in the widespread zeal for social progress. Douai now takes its tone, its ways of life, and its fashions from Paris; in Douai there will soon be little left of the old Flemish tradition save its assiduous and cordial hospitality, together with the courtesy of Spain, the opulence and cleanliness of Holland. The old brick-built houses are being replaced by hotels with white stone facings. Substantial Batavian comfort is disappearing to make way for elegant frivolity imported from France.

The house in which the events took place which are to be described in the course of this story was almost half-way

down the Rue de Paris, and has borne in Douai, for more than two hundred years, the name of the *Maison Claes*.

The Van Claes had formerly been among the most celebrated of the families of craftsmen who founded the commercial prosperity of the Netherlands. For many generations Claes succeeded Claes as the Dean of the great and powerful Guild of Weavers in Ghent. When Charles V. endeavored to deprive the city of its privileges and Ghent rose in revolt, the wealthiest of the Claes found himself so deeply compromised that, foreseeing the inevitable end and the fate reserved for him and his companions, he sent away his wife and children and valuables under a French escort, before the city was invested by the Imperial troops. Events proved that the fears of the Dean of the Guild were but too well founded. When the city capitulated, he and some few fellow-citizens were excepted by name from the general amnesty, and the defender of the rights and privileges of Ghent was hanged as a rebel against the Empire. The death of Claes and his companions bore its fruits; in the years to come these useless cruelties were to cost the King of Spain the best part of the Netherlands. Of all seed sown on earth, the blood of the martyrs is the surest, and the harvest follows soonest upon the sowing.

While Philip II. visited the sins of revolted Ghent upon its children's children, and ruled Douai with a rod of iron, the Claes (whose vast fortunes were unimpaired) connected themselves by marriage with the elder branch of the noble house of Molina, an alliance which repaired the fortunes of that illustrious family, and enabled them to purchase back their estates; and the broad lands of Nourho, in the kingdom of Leon, came to support an empty title. After this, the course of the family fortunes was sufficiently uneventful until the beginning of the nineteenth century, when the family of Claes, or rather the Douai branch of it, was represented in the person of M. Balthazar Claes-Molina, Count of Nourho, who preferred to style himself simply Balthazar Claes. Of all the vast wealth accumulated by his ancestors who had

kept so many looms at work, and set in motion so many wheels of commerce, there remained to Balthazar an income of about fifteen thousand livres, derived from landed property in and around Douai, the house in the Rue de Paris, and its furniture, which was worth a little fortune. As for the estates in Leon, they had caused a lawsuit between Molina of Flanders and Molina of Spain. The Molinas of Leon gained the day, and assumed the title of Counts of Nourho, although in truth it belonged to the elder branch, the Flemish Claes; but bourgeois vanity in the Belgian house rose superior to Castilian pride.

When, therefore, formal designations were registered, Balthazar Claes put off the rags of Spanish nobility to shine with all the lustre of his descent from citizens of Ghent. The instinct of patriotism was so strong in the exiled families that until the very end of the eighteenth century the Claes remained faithful to family traditions, manners, and customs. They only married into the most strictly bourgeois families, requiring a certain number of aldermen, burgomasters, or the like civic dignitaries among the ancestors of the bride-elect before receiving her among them. Now and then a Claes would seek a wife in Bruges or Ghent, or as far away as Liège, or even in Holland, that so the old domestic traditions might be kept up. Their circle became gradually more and more restricted, until toward the end of the last century it was limited to some seven or eight families of municipal nobility, wearers of heavy-hanging, toga-like cloaks, who combined the dignified gravity of the magistrate with that of the Spanish grandee, and whose manner of life and habits were in harmony with their appearance. The family of Claes was looked on by the rest of the citizens with a kind of awe that was almost superstitious. The unswerving loyalty, the spotless integrity of the Claes, together with their staid, impressive demeanor under all circumstances, had given rise to a sort of legend of the Claes, and the "Maison Claes" was as much an institution in the city as

the Fete de Gayant. The spirit of old Flanders seemed to fill the old house in the Rue de Paris, in which lovers of municipal antiquity would find a perfect example of the unpretending houses which the wealthy burghers of the Middle Ages built for themselves to dwell in.

The principal adornment of the house front was the great doorway with its folding leaves of oak, studded with large nails, arranged in groups of five; in the centre the Claes had proudly carved their arms, two spindles conjoined. The pointed archway was of sandstone, and was surmounted by a little statuette of St. Genevieve with her spindle, set in a sort of shrine with a cross above it. The delicate carving about the shrine and the doorway had grown somewhat darker by the lapse of time; but so carefully had it been kept by the owners of the house, that every detail was visible at a passing glance. The clustered shafts in the jambs on either side the doorway had preserved their dark gray color, and shone as if their surfaces had been polished. The windows were all alike. The sill was supported by a richly-carved bracket, the window frame was of white stone and in the form of a cross, so that the window itself was divided into four unequal parts, the two lower lights being nearly twice the size of the upper. Each of the upper divisions was surmounted by an arch, which sprang from the height of the central mullion. These arches consisted of a triple row of bricks, each row jutting out above the one beneath it by way of ornament; the bricks in each row, moreover, alternately projected and receded about an inch, so as to form a sort of checker pattern. The small lozenge-shaped panes were set in exceedingly slender reticulating bars, which were painted red.

For the sake of added strength a course of white stone was built at intervals into the brick walls, which were jointed with white mortar, and the corners of the house were constructed of white stone quoins.

There were two windows on the ground floor, one on either side of the door, five in the first story, and but three

in the second, while the third immediately beneath the roof was lighted by a single circular window, divided into five compartments, and faced with sandstone. This window was set in the centre of the gable like a rose window over the arched gateway of a cathedral.

The weathercock on the ridge of the roof was a spindle filled with flax. The two sides of the great gable rose stepwise from the height of the first story, and at this departing point a grotesque gargoyle on either side discharged the rainwater from the gutters. All round the base of the house there ran a projecting course of sandstone like a step. Finally, on either side, between the window and the door lay a trap door, heavily bound and hinged with iron scroll-work, a relic of the days of yore.

Ever since the house had been built the front had been carefully scoured twice a year; not a particle of mortar came loose or fell out but was immediately replaced. The costliest marbles in Paris are not kept so clean and so free from dust as the window-bars, sills, and outside stonework of this Flemish dwelling. The whole house front was in perfect preservation. The color of the surface of the brick might be somewhat darkened by time, but it was as carefully kept as an old picture or some book-lover's cherished folio—treasures that would never grow old were it not for the noxious gases distilled by our atmosphere, which no less threaten the lives of their owners. The clouded skies of Flanders, the dampness of the climate, the absence of light or air caused by the somewhat narrow street, soon dimmed the glories of this periodically renewed cleanliness, and, moreover, gave the house a dreary and depressing look. A poet would have welcomed a few blades of grass in the openwork of the little shrine, and some mosses on the surface of the sandstone; he might have wished for a cleft or crack here and there in those too orderly rows of bricks, so that a swallow might find a place in which to build her nest beneath the red triple arches of the windows. There was an excessive neatness and smoothness about the house front,

worn with repeated scourings; an air of sedate propriety and of grim respectability which would have driven a Romantic writer out of the opposite house if he had been so ill advised as to take up his abode there.

When a visitor had pulled the wrought-iron bell-handle that hung by the side of the door, and a maid-servant from some inner region had opened the heavy folding-doors, they fell to again with a clang that echoed up into the lofty roof of a great paved gallery, and died away in remote murmurs through the house. You would have thought that the doors had been made of bronze. From the gallery, which was always cool, with its walls painted to resemble marble, and its paved floor strewn with fine sand, you entered a large square inner court paved with glazed tiles of a greenish color. To the left lay the kitchens, laundry, and servants' hall; to the right the wood-house, the coal-cellars, and various offices. Every window and door was ornamented with carving, which was kept exquisitely spotless and free from dust. The whole place was shut in by four red walls striped with bars of white stone, so that the daylight which penetrated into it seemed in its passage to take a faint red tint, which was reflected by every figure, and gave a mysterious charm and strange unfamiliar look to every least detail.

On the further side of this courtyard stood that portion of the house in which the family lived, the *quartier de derrière*, as they call it in Flanders, a building exactly similar to the one facing the street. The first room on the ground floor was a parlor lighted by four windows; two looked out upon the courtyard, and two upon a garden, a space of ground about as large as that on which the house was built. Access to this garden and to the courtyard was given by two opposite glass doors, which occupied the same relative position as the street door; so that as soon as a stranger entered, the whole house lay before him, as well as a distant vista of the greenery at the further end of the garden beyond it.

Visitors were received in that portion of the house which

looked out upon the street, and strangers were lodged in apartments in the second story; but though these rooms contained works of art and costly furniture, there was nothing which, in the eyes of Claes himself, could be compared with the art treasures that filled the rooms which had been the centre of family life for centuries, and a discerning taste would have confirmed his judgment. The historian should not omit to record of the Claes who died for the cause of freedom in Ghent that he had accumulated nearly forty thousand silver marks, gained by the manufacture of sail-cloths for the all-powerful navy of Venice. The Flemish craftsman was a man of substance, and had for his friend the celebrated wood-carver Van Huysium of Bruges. Many times the artist had had recourse to his friend's purse. When Ghent rose in revolt, Van Huysium, then himself a wealthy man, had secretly carved for his old friend a piece of panelling of massive ebony, on which he had wrought the story of Van Artevelde, the brewer who for a little while ruled over Flanders. This piece of woodwork consisted of sixty panels, and contained about fourteen hundred figures; it was considered to be Van Huysium's masterpiece.

When Charles V. made up his mind to celebrate his entry into the city which gave him birth by hanging twenty-six of its burghers, the victims were consigned to the custody of a captain, who (so it was said) had offered to connive at Claes's escape in return for these panels of Van Huysium's, but the weaver had previously sent them into France.

The parlor in the house in the Rue de Paris was wainscoted entirely with these panels. Van Huysium, out of respect for the memory of the martyr, had come himself to set them in their wooden framework, painted with ultramarine, and covered with a gilded network, so that this is the most complete example of a master whose least fragments are now worth their weight in gold. Titian's portrait of Claes in the robes that he wore as President of the Tribunal des Parchons looked down from the chimney-piece; he

still seemed to be the head of the family which regarded him with veneration as its great man. The chimney-piece, itself originally plain stone, had been reconstructed of white marble during the eighteenth century. A venerable time-piece stood upon the ledge between two five-branched candle sconces, tortuous, elaborate, and in the worst possible taste, but all of massive silver. The four windows were draped with crimson brocaded damask curtains, covered with a dark flowered pattern, and lined with white silk; the furniture had been re-covered with the same material in the time of Louis XIV. The polished floor was evidently modern: large squares of white wood, with slips of oak inserted between them, but the ceiling yet preserved the peculiarly deep hues of Dutch oak. Perhaps it had been respected because Van Huysium had carved the masks on the medallions bordered with scrolls which adorned it.

In each of the four corners of the parlor stood a short column, with a five-branched silver sconce upon it, like those upon the chimney-piece, and a round table occupied the centre of the room. Several card tables were ranged along the walls with much precision; and on the white marble slabs of two gilded console tables stood, at the time when this story begins, two glass globes full of water, in which gold and silver fish were swimming above a bed of sand and shells.

The room was sombre, and yet aglow with color. The ceiling of dark oak seemed to absorb the light, and to give none of it back into the room. If the sunlight pouring in from the windows that looked out into the garden scintillated from every polished ebony figure on the opposite wall, the light admitted from the courtyard was always so faint that even the gold network on the other side looked dim in the perpetual twilight.

A bright day brought out all the glories of the place; but, for the most part, its hues were subdued and soft, and, like the sombre browns and reds of autumn forests, they took brighter hues only in the sun. It is unneces-

sary to describe the "Maison Claes" at further length. Many of the scenes in the course of this story will, of course, take place in other parts of the house, but it will be sufficient for the present to have some idea of its general arrangement.

On a Sunday afternoon toward the end of August, in the year 1812, a woman was sitting in a large easy-chair by one of the windows that looked out on the garden. It was after the time of vespers. The rays of sunlight falling on the side of the house slanted across the room in broad beams, played with fantastic effect on the opposite wall, and died away among the sombre ebony figures of the panels; but the woman sat in the purple shadow cast by the damask curtain. A painter of mediocre ability could not have failed to make a striking picture if he had faithfully portrayed a face with so sad and wistful an expression. The woman was sitting with her feet stretched out before her in a listless attitude; apparently she had lost all consciousness of her physical existence, and one all-absorbing thought had complete possession of her mind, a thought which seemed to open up the paths of the future just as a ray of sunlight piercing through the clouds lights up a gleaming path on the horizon of the sea. Her hands hung over the arms of the chair; her head, as though it bore a load of thought too heavy, had fallen back against the cushions. She wore a loose cambric gown, very simply made; the scarf about her shoulders was carelessly knotted on her breast, so that the lines of her figure were almost concealed. Apparently she preferred to call attention to her face rather than to her person; and it was a face which, even if it had not been brought into strong relief by the light, would have arrested and fixed the attention of any beholder, for its expression of dull, hopeless misery would have struck the most heedless child. Nothing is more terrible to witness than such anguish as this in one who seldom gives way to it; the burning tears that fell from time to time seemed like the fiery lava flood of a volcano. So might a dying mother weep who is compelled to

leave her children in the lowest depths of wretchedness without a single human protector.

The lady seemed to be about forty years of age. She was more nearly beautiful now than she had ever been in her girlhood. Clearly she was no daughter of the land. Her hair was thick and black, and fell in curls over her shoulders and about her face; her forehead was very prominent, narrow at the temples, sallow in hue, but the black eyes flashed fire from beneath her brows, and she had the dark pallor of the typical Spaniard. The perfect oval of her face attracted a second glance; the ravages of smallpox had destroyed the delicacy of its outlines, but had not marred its graciousness and dignity; at times it seemed as if the soul had power to restore to it all its pristine purity of form. If pride of birth was revealed in the thick tightly-folded lips, there was also natural kindliness and graciousness in their expression; but the feature which gave most distinction to a masculine type of face was an aquiline nose. Its curve was somewhat too strongly marked, the result, apparently, of some interior defect; but there was a subtle refinement in its outlines, in the thin septum and fine transparent nostrils that glowed in the light with a bright red. She was a woman who might, or might not, be considered beautiful, but no one could fail to notice the vigorous yet feminine head.

She was short, lame, and deformed; she had married later than women usually do, and this partly because it was insisted that her slow-wittedness was stupidity; yet more than one man had read the indications of ardent passion and of inexhaustible tenderness in her face, and had fallen completely under the spell of a charm that was difficult to reconcile with so many defects. She bore in many ways a strong resemblance to the Spanish grandee, her ancestor the Duke of Casa-Real. Perhaps the force of the charm which romantic natures had erewhile found so tyrannous, the power of a fascination that sways men's hearts, but is powerless to rule their destinies, had never in her life been greater than now, when it was wasted, so to speak, on empty space. She

seemed to be watching the gold-fish in the glass before her, but in truth her eyes saw nothing, and she raised them from time to time, as if imploring heaven in despair; it would seem that such trouble as hers could be confided to God alone.

The room was perfectly silent save for the chirping of the crickets without; the shrill notes of a few cicadas came in with a breath of hot air from the little garden, which was like a furnace in the afternoon sun. From a neighboring room there came smothered sounds; silver or china rattled, or chairs were moved, as the servants laid the cloth for dinner.

Suddenly the lady started and seemed to listen; she took her handkerchief, dried her eyes, and endeavored to smile; so successfully did she efface all traces of sorrow that from her seeming serenity it might have been thought that she had never known an anxiety or a care in her life. It was the sound of a man's footstep that had wrought the change. It echoed in the long gallery built over the kitchens and the servants' quarters, which united the front part of the house with the back portion in which the family lived. Whether it was because weak health had so long confined her to the house that she could recognize the least noise in it at once; or because a highly-wrought temperament ever on the watch can detect sounds that are imperceptible to ordinary ears; or because nature, in compensation for so many physical disadvantages, had bestowed a gift of sense-perception seldom accorded to human beings apparently more happily constituted; this sense of hearing was abnormally acute in her. The sound of the footsteps came nearer and nearer. And soon, not only for an impassioned soul such as hers, which can annihilate time and space at will that so it may find its other self, but for any stranger, a man's step on the staircase which led to the parlor was audible enough.

There was something in the sound of that footstep which would have struck the most careless mortal; it was impossible to hear it with indifference. We are excited by the mere sounds of hurry or flight; when a man springs up and

raises the alarm of "Fire!" his feet are at least as eloquent as his tongue, and the impression left by a slow measured tread is every whit as powerful. The deliberate, heavy, lagging footfall in the gallery would no doubt have irritated impatient people; but a nervous person, or an observer of human nature, could scarcely have heard it without feeling a thrill of something very like dread. Was there any life in those feet that moved so mechanically? It was a dull, heavy sound, as if the floor boards had been struck by an iron weight. The slow, uncertain step called up visions of a man bending under a load of years, or of a thinker walking majestically beneath the weight of worlds. The man reached the lowest stair, and set foot upon the pavement slowly and irresolutely. In the great hall he paused for a moment. A passage led thence to the servants' quarters, a door concealed in the wainscot gave admittance to the parlor, and through a second parallel door you entered the dining-room.

A light tremor, caused by a sensation like an electric shock, ran through the frame of the woman in the easy-chair; but a sweet smile trembled on her lips, her face lighted up with eager expectation, and grew fair and radiant like the face of an Italian Madonna. She summoned all her strength, and forced back her terrors into some inner depth; then she turned and looked toward the door set in the panels in the corner of the parlor; it flew open so suddenly that the startling sound was quite sufficient to account for and to cover her agitation.

Balthazar Claes appeared and made several paces forward; he either did not look at the woman in the low chair, or if he looked at her it was with unseeing eyes. He stood upright in the middle of the parlor, his head slightly bent, and supported by his right hand. The smile faded from the woman's face; her heart was pierced by a horrible pang, felt none the less keenly because it had come to be a part of her daily experience, her dark brows contracted with pain, deepening lines already traced there by the frequent expression

of strong feeling, and her eyes filled with tears, which she hastily brushed away, as she looked at Balthazar.

There was something exceedingly impressive about the head of the house of Claes. In his younger days he had borne a strong resemblance to the heroic martyr who had threatened to play the part of Artevelde and defied the Emperor, Charles V.; but at the present moment the man of fifty or thereabout might have been sixty years of age and more; and with the beginnings of a premature old age, the likeness to his great-minded ancestor had ceased. His tall figure was slightly bent; perhaps he had contracted the habit by stooping over his books, or perhaps the curvature was due to the weight of a head over-heavy for the spine. He was broad-chested and square-shouldered; his lower extremities, though muscular, were thin; you could not help casting about for some explanation of this puzzling singularity in a frame which evidently had once been perfectly proportioned. His thick, fair hair fell carelessly over his shoulders in the German fashion, in a disorder which was quite in keeping with a strange air of slovenliness and general neglect. His forehead was broad and high; the prominence of the region to which Gall has assigned Ideality was very strongly marked. The clear, dark-blue eyes seemed to have a power of keen and quick vision, a characteristic often noted in students of occult sciences. The shape of the nose had doubtless once been perfect; it was very long, the nostrils had apparently grown wider by involuntary tension of the muscles in the continual exercise of the sense of smell. The hollows in a face which was beginning to age seemed all the deeper by force of contrast with the high cheekbones, thickly covered with short hair. The mouth with its gracious outlines seemed, as it were, to be imprisoned between the nose and a short, sharply turned-up chin.

Certain theorists, who have a fancy for discerning animal resemblances in human countenances, would have seen in the long, rather than oval, face of Balthazar Claes a likeness to the head of a horse. There was no softness or roundness

about its outlines; the skin was tightly drawn over the bones as if it had shrunk under the scorching influence of a fire that burned within; there were moments when the eyes looked out into space as if seeking for the realization of his hopes, and at such times this fire that consumed him seemed to escape from his nostrils.

There are deep thoughts which seem to be living forces of which great men are the embodiment; some such thought seemed to be visibly expressed in the pale face with its deeply carved wrinkles, to have scored the furrows on a brow like that of some old king full of cares, and to shine forth most clearly from the brilliant eyes: the fire in them seemed to be fed by the temperate life which is the result of the tyrannous discipline of great ideas, and by the fires of a mighty intelligence. They were deeply set and surrounded by dark circles, which seemed to tell of long vigils and of terrible prostration of mind consequent on reiterated disappointments, of hopes that sprang up anew only to be blighted, of wear and tear of body and mind. Art and Science are jealous divinities; their devotees betray themselves by unmistakable signs. There was a dreamy abstractedness and aloofness in Balthazar Claes's manner and bearing which was quite in keeping with the magnificent head so lacking in human quality. His large hands, covered with hair, were soiled; there were jet-black lines at the tips of the long finger nails. There was an air of slovenliness about the master of the house which would not have been tolerated in any of its other inmates.

His shoes were seldom cleaned, or the laces were broken or missing. His black cloth breeches were covered with stains, buttons were lacking on his waistcoat, his cravat was askew, his coat had assumed a greenish tint, here and there the seams had given way; everything about him, down to the smallest trifle, combined to produce an uncouth effect, which in another would have indicated the lowest depths of outcast misery, but in Balthazar Claes it was the neglect of genius.

Vice and genius bring about results so similar that ordinary people are often misled by them. What is genius but a form of excess which consumes time and money and health and strength? It is an even shorter road to the hospital than the path of the prodigal. Men, moreover, appear to pay more respect to vice than to genius; for they decline to give it credit or credence. It would seem that genius concerns itself with aims so far remote that society is shy of casting accounts with it in its lifetime, such poverty and wretchedness are clearly unpardonable. Society prefers to have nothing to do with genius.

Yet there were moments when it would have been hard to refuse admiration to Balthazar Claes—moments when, in spite of his absent-mindedness and mysterious preoccupation, some impulse drew him to his fellows, and the face of the thinker was lighted up by a kindly thought expressed in the eyes, the hard light in them disappeared, and he looked round him and returned (so to speak) to life and its realities; at such times there was an attractive beauty in his face, a gracious spirit looked forth from it. Any one who saw him then would regret that such a man should lead the life of a hermit, and add that "he must have been very handsome in his youth." A vulgar error. Balthazar Claes had never looked more interesting than at this moment. Lavater would certainly have studied the noble head, have recognized the unwearying patience, the stainless character, the steadfast loyalty of the Fleming, the great and magnanimous nature, the power of passion that seemed calm because it was strong. Such a man would have been a constant and devoted friend, his morals would have been pure, his word sacred; all these qualities should have been dedicated to the service of his country, to his own circle of friends, and to his family; it was the will of the man which had given them a fatal misdirection; and the citizen, the responsible head of a household and disposer of a large fortune, who should have been the guide of his children toward a fair future, lived apart in a world of his own in converse with a familiar spirit, a world

in which his duties and affections counted for nothing. A priest would have seen in him a man inspired by God, an artist would have hailed him as a great master, an enthusiast might have taken him for some seer after the pattern of Swedenborg.

As he stood by the window, his ragged, disordered, and threadbare costume was in strange contrast with the graceful dainty attire of the woman who watched him so sadly. A nice taste in dress often distinguishes persons of mental ability or refinement of soul who suffer from bodily deformity. They are conscious that their beauty is the beauty of mind and soul, and are content to dress simply, or they discover how to divert attention from their physical defects by a studied elegance in every detail. And the woman in the low chair had not only a generous soul, but she loved Balthazar Claes with that woman's intuition which is a foretaste of the intelligence of angels. She had been brought up in one of the noblest families of Belgium, so that even if her taste had not been instinctive it would have been acquired; and, tutored since then by her desire to please the eyes of the man she loved, she had learned to dress herself admirably, and to adopt a style which subdued the effect of her deformity. Moreover, although one shoulder was certainly larger than the other, there was no other defect in her figure. She glanced through the window into the courtyard, and then into the garden, as if to make sure that no one was within hearing, turned meekly to Balthazar, and spoke in the low tones that Flemish women use, for the love between these two had long since conquered Castilian pride.

"You must be very deep in your work, Balthazar? This is the thirty-third Sunday since you have been to mass or vespers."

Claes made no reply. His wife bowed her head, clasped her hands, and waited, watching him the while. She knew that his silence was due neither to contempt nor to indifference, but to the tyranny of an all-absorbing thought. In the depths of some natures the sensitive delicacy of youth

lingers long after youth has departed, and Balthazar Claes would have shrunk from uttering any thought that might wound, however slightly, a woman who was always oppressed with the painful consciousness of her physical deformity. And this dread was ever present with him. He understood, as few men do, how a word or a single glance has power to efface the happiness of whole years; nay, that such words have a more cruel power, because they are utterly at variance with the constant tenderness of the past; for we are so made that our happiness makes us more keenly sensitive to pain, while sorrow has no such power of intensifying a transitory gleam of joy. After a few moments, Balthazar roused himself, gave a quick glance round him, and said, "Vespers? . . . . Ah! the children have gone to vespers."

He stepped toward the window, and looked out into the garden, where the tulips blazed in all their glory. Then he stopped suddenly, as if he had come into collision with a wall, and exclaimed, "Why should they not combine in a given time?"

"Can he be going mad?" his terrified wife asked herself.

If the reader is to understand the interest of this scene, and the situation out of which it arose, it will be necessary to glance over the previous history of Balthazar Claes and of the granddaughter of the Duke of Casa-Real.

Toward the end of the year 1783, M. Balthazar Claes-Molina de Nourho, then twenty-two years of age, might have passed for a "fine gentleman," as we say in France. He had just completed his education in Paris; his manners had been formed in the society of Mme. d'Egmont, a set composed of Frenchmen who came originally of Belgian families, or of Belgians distinguished either by birth or by fortune. Great nobles and persons of the highest fashion, such as the Count of Horn, the Prince of Aremberg, the Spanish Ambassador, and Helvétius were among the Belgian residents in Paris. The young Claes had relations and friends there who introduced him into the great world, just

as the great world was about to return to chaos; but, like many young men, he was attracted at first by glory and by knowledge rather than by frivolity. He frequented the society of learned men, waxed enthusiastic for science, and became an ardent disciple of Lavoisier, who was then better known for the vast fortune he had acquired as farmer-general of taxes than for the scientific discoveries which were to make the name of the great chemist famous long after the farmer-general was forgotten.

But Claes was young, and as handsome as Helvetius, and Lavoisier was not his only instructor. Under the tuition of women in Paris he soon learned to distil the more volatile elixirs of wit and gallantry; and although he had previously thrown himself into his studies with an enthusiasm that had won the commendations of his master, he deserted Lavoisier's laboratory to take final lessons in *savoir-vivre* under the guidance of the arbitresses of good manners and good taste, the queens of the high society which forms a sort of family all over Europe.

These intoxicating dreams of success did not last long, however; Balthazar Claes breathed the air of Paris for a while; and then, in no long time, he turned his back on the capital, wearied by the empty life, which had nothing in it to satisfy an enthusiastic and affectionate nature. It seemed to him that the quiet happiness of family life, a vision called up by the very name of his native Flanders, was the life best suited to his character and to the aspirations of his heart. The gilding of Parisian salons had not effaced old memories of the sombre harmonies of the parlor in the old house in Douai, of the little garden, and the happy days of his childhood.

Those who would fain dwell in Paris should have no ties of home or of fatherland. Paris is the chosen city of the cosmopolitan, or of those who are wedded to social ambition; by means of art, science, or political power they gain a hold on the world which they never relax.

The child of Flanders went back to the house in Douai

as La Fontaine's pigeon flew home to its nest. It was the day of the Fête Gayant, and tears came into his eyes at the sight of the procession. Gayant, the Luck of the city, the embodiment of the spirit of old Flemish traditions, had been introduced into Douai since his family had been driven to take refuge there. The Maison Claes was empty and silent; his father and mother had died during his absence, and for some time family affairs required his presence there.

After the first sorrow for his loss his thoughts turned to marriage. All the sacred ties which bound him to his home and the pieties of the hearth had reawakened a strong desire in him to complete the happy existence of which he had dreamed; he determined to do as his forefathers had done, and went to Ghent, to Bruges, and to Antwerp in search of a bride. He probably had ideas of his own as to marriage, for it had always been said of him from his earliest youth that he never could keep to the beaten track, or do as other people did.

It so fell out that one day while on a visit to one of his relations in Ghent he heard of a young lady in Brussels concerning whom opinions differed considerably. Some considered that Mlle. Temninck's beauty was quite spoiled by her deformity, others hotly insisted that she was perfection. Among these last was Balthazar Claes's somewhat elderly cousin, who told his guests that, beautiful or no, Mlle. Temninck had a soul which would have induced him to marry her if he had been choosing a wife. And with that he told how she had given up all her claims on the family estates so that her younger brother might make a marriage befitting his rank and name; thus setting his happiness before her own, and sacrificing her life to him, for it was scarcely to be expected that Mlle. Temninck would marry now that she had no fortune and the bloom of youth was past, when no suitor had presented himself for the heiress in her girlhood.

A few days later Balthazar Claes had obtained an introduction to Mlle. Temninck, now a woman twenty-five years

of age, and had fallen deeply in love with her. Josephine de Temninck chose to regard this as a passing fancy, and refused to listen to M. Claes; but the influence of passion is very subtle, and in this love for her in a man who had youth and good looks and a straight, well-knit frame there was something so attractive to the poor lame and deformed girl that she yielded to it.

Could a whole volume suffice to tell the story of the love that thus dawned in the girl's heart? The world had pronounced her to be plain, and she had meekly acquiesced in the decision, conscious though she was of possessing the irresistible charm which calls forth true and lasting love. And now at the prospect of happiness, what fierce jealousy awoke in her, what wild projects of vengeance if a rival stole a glance, what agitations and fears such as seldom fall to the lot of women, which cannot but lose by being passed over in a few brief words! The analysis must be minute. Doubt, the dramatic element in love, would be the keynote of a story in which certain souls would find once more the poetry of those early days of uncertainty, long since lost but not forgotten. The ecstasy in the depths of the heart which the face never betrays, the fear of not being understood, and the unspeakable joy of a swift response; the misgivings which lead the soul to shrink within itself; the moments when, as if drawn forth by some magnetic power, the soul reveals itself in the eyes by infinite subtle shades; wild thoughts of suicide that arise at a word, only to be laid to rest by a tone in a voice whose vibrations reveal unsuspected depths of feeling; tremulous glances full of terrible audacity; swift, passionate longings to speak or act rendered powerless by their very vehemence; communings of soul with soul in commonplace phrases which owe all their eloquence to the faltering of the voice; mysterious workings of that divine discretion and modesty of soul which is generous in the shade, and finds exquisite delight in sacrifices which can never be recognized; youthful love, in short, with the weaknesses of its strength.

Mlle. Josephine de Temninck was a coquette through loftiness of soul. The painful consciousness of her deformity made her as unapproachable and hard to please as the prettiest of women. She dreaded that a day would come when her lover would cease to care for her, and the thought awakened her pride and destroyed her confidence in herself. With stoical firmness, she locked away in her inmost heart the first feelings of happiness in which other women love to deck themselves in the eyes of the world. The more love drew her to Balthazar Claes, the less she dared to give expression to love. A glance, a gesture, a question, or a response from a pretty woman would have been flattering to a man; but for her was not any advance a humiliating speculation? A pretty woman can be herself, people look leniently on her follies or mistakes; but a single glance has power to stop the play of expression on a plain woman's features, to make her still more timid, shy, and awkward. Does she not know that she of all women can afford no blunders; that no indulgence will be extended to her; nay, that no one will give her any opportunity of repairing them? She must always be faultless; does not the thought chill and dishearten her while the constant strain exhausts her powers? Such a woman can only live in an atmosphere of divine indulgence, and where can the hearts be found in which indulgence is not poisoned by a lurking taint of pity?

There is a sort of consideration more painful to sensitive souls than even positive unkindness, for it aggravates their misfortunes by continually giving them prominence. The cruel politeness of society was intolerable to Mlle. de Temninck. She schooled herself into self-repression, forced back into some inner depth the most beautiful thoughts that arose in her soul, and took refuge in an icy reserve of manner and bearing. She only dared to love in secret, and was eloquent or charming only in solitude. She was plain and insignificant in broad daylight, but she would have been a beautiful woman if she could have lived by candle-light. Not

seldom she had made perilous trials of Balthazar's love, risking her whole happiness to be the surer of it, disdaining the aid of dress and ornaments, by which the effect of deformity could be softened or concealed, and the Spaniard's eyes grew full of witchery when she saw that even thus she was beautiful for Balthazar Claes.

Yet even the rare moments when she ventured to give herself up to the joy of being loved were imbittered by distrust and fears. Before long she began to ask herself whether Claes wished to marry her that he might have a docile slave, whether he had not some defect which made him content to wed a poor deformed girl. The doubts and anxieties which continually harassed her made those hours unspeakably precious in which she felt sure that this was a true and lasting love which should make her amends for all the slights of the world. She provoked discussions on the delicate subject of her own plainness, dwelling upon it and exaggerating it that she might the better probe her lover's nature, and came in this way by some truths but little flattering; yet she loved him for the perplexity in which he found himself when she had led him on to say that a woman is most beloved for a beautiful soul and for the devotion which makes the days of life flow on in quiet happiness; that after a few years of marriage a wife may be the loveliest woman on earth or the plainest, it makes no difference to her husband. In support of this theory he had heaped together such truth as lies in various paradoxical assertions that beauty is of very little consequence, till he suddenly became aware of the ungraciousness of his arguments. All the goodness of his heart was revealed by the tact and delicacy with which he gradually changed his ground and made Mlle. de Temninck understand that for him she was perfect.

Perhaps, in a woman, devotion is the highest height of love. Devotion was not wanting in this girl who did not dare to hope that love would not fail. She felt attracted by the prospect of a struggle in which sentiment was to

triumph over beauty; there was something great, she thought, in giving herself to love with no blind faith that love would last; and finally, this happiness, brief as it might prove, must cost her so dear that she could not refuse to taste it. These questionings and inward struggles gave all the charm, all the varying moods of passion to this exalted nature, and inspired in Balthazar a love that was almost chivalrous.

The marriage took place in the beginning of the year 1795. They went back to Douai to spend the first weeks of their married life in the ancestral home of the Claes. The household treasures there had been increased. Mlle. de Temninck brought with her several fine paintings by Murillo and Velasquez, her mother's diamonds, and the splendid wedding presents sent by her brother, who had succeeded to the title, and was now Duke of Casa-Real. Few women were as happy as Mme. Claes. There was not the slightest cloud in the happiness that lasted for fifteen years, a happiness that, like a bright light, transformed even the most trivial details of daily life.

In most men there are inequalities of character which cause continual dissonances, small weaknesses that lead to bickerings, till the harmony of domestic life is spoiled, and the fair ideals perish. One man may be conscientious and hardworking, but he is hard and stern; another is good-natured but obstinate; a third will love his wife sincerely, but he never knows his own mind; while a fourth is so absorbed in his ambitions that he looks on affection as a debt to be discharged, and if he gives all the vanities of fortune he takes all joy out of the day.

Mediocrity, in short, is by its very nature incomplete, though its sins of omission and commission are not heinous. Clever folk are as changeable as the barometer, genius alone is essentially good. Perfect happiness is accordingly only to be found at either extreme of the intellectual scale; there is a like equability of temperament in the good-natured idiot and in the man of genius, arising in the one case from weak-

ness, and in the other from strength of character. Both are capable of a constant sweetness of temper which softens the roughnesses of life. In the one its source is an easy-natured tolerance, and in the other it springs from indulgence: a man of genius, moreover, is the interpreter of a sublime thought, which cannot fail to bring his whole life into conformity with itself. Both natures are simple and transparent; the one because of its shallowness, the other by reason of its depth. Clever women, therefore, are sufficiently ready to take a dunce as the best substitute for a man of genius.

Balthazar's greatness of character showed itself from the first in the most trivial details of life. Conjugal love was a magnificent thing in his eyes; he determined to develop all its beauty, and, like all powerful characters, he could not bear that there should be any falling short in attainment. His ingenuity continually varied the calm monotony of happiness, and everything that he did bore the stamp of a noble nature. For instance, although he was in sympathy with the philosophical movement of the eighteenth century, he installed a priest in his household until the year 1801 (a step which laid him open to the severe penalties of the Revolutionary code), humoring the bigoted Catholicism which his Spanish wife had imbibed with her mother's milk. After the Roman Catholic worship was restored in France he went with her every Sunday to mass.

His attachment never quitted the forms of passion. He never asserted the protecting power that women love so well to feel, because to his wife it would have seemed like pity. On the contrary, by a most ingenious form of flattery he treated her as his equal, and would break into playful rebellion against her authority, as a man will sometimes permit himself to set the power of a pretty woman at defiance. A smile of happiness always hovered upon his lips, and his tones were unvaryingly gentle.

He loved his Josephine for her sake and for his own with a warmth and intensity which is a constant tribute to the beauty and the character of a wife. Fidelity, often the re-

sult of social, religious, or interested considerations, seemed in his case to be involuntary, and was always accompanied by the sweet flatteries of the springtime of love. Duty was the sole obligation of marriage which was unknown to these two equally loving beings, for Balthazar Claes found in Josephine de Temninck a constant and complete realization of his hopes. His heart was always satisfied to the full; he was always happy, and never weary of his happiness. As might have been expected, the granddaughter of the house of Casa-Real, with her Spanish blood, possessed the secret of an "infinite variety," but she had no less a capacity for a limitless devotion, and a woman's genius lies in devotion, as all her beauty consists in grace. Her love was a blind fanaticism; at a sign from him she would have gone joyfully to her death. Balthazar's delicacy had brought out all the womanly generosity of her nature, and she longed to give more than she received. This mutual exchange of a happiness which each in turn lavished upon the other, visibly centred her life without her, and filled her words, her looks, and actions with a love that only grew stronger with time. On all sides gratitude enriched and varied the life of the heart, just as the certainty that each lived only for the other made littleness impossible, and the least accessories of such a life ceased to be trivialities.

But in the whole feminine creation are there any happier women than the deformed wife who is not crooked for the eyes she loves, the lame woman when her husband would not have her other than she is, and the wife grown old and gray who is still young for him? Human passion can go no further than this. When a woman is adored for what is usually regarded as a defect, is not this her greatest glory? It is easy to forget in a moment's fascination that a woman does not walk straight; but when she is loved because she is lame, it is the apotheosis of her infirmity. In the evangel of women these words should perhaps be written, "*Blessed are the imperfect, for theirs is the kingdom of love.*" And of a truth beauty must be a misfortune for a woman, for the

flower of beauty that withers so soon counts for so much in the feeling that she inspires; is she not loved for her beauty as an heiress is wedded for her gold? But a woman without this perishable dower, after which the children of Adam seek so eagerly, knows the love that is love indeed, the inmost mystery of passion, the union of soul with soul. The day of disillusion can never come for her. Her charm is not recognized by the world, she owes it no allegiance, and is fair for one alone; and when she makes it her glory that her defects should be forgotten she cannot but succeed in her aim.

Accordingly, the best loved women in history have been by no means perfectly beautiful for ordinary eyes; Cleopatra, Joanna of Naples, Diana of Poitiers, Mlle. de la Vallière, Mme. de Pompadour, and nearly all women famous throughout the world for the love which they once inspired, have had their defects and shortcomings, while others of whom it is recorded that there was no flaw in their loveliness have over and over again seen love end in piteous tragedy. Do mankind live, after all, rather by sentiment than by pleasure? Perhaps there is a limit to the charm of mere physical beauty, while the beauty of the soul is infinite! Is not this the moral of the tale which forms a setting to the "Arabian Nights"? If Henry VIII. had found a hard-featured wife, she might have defied the axe and retained the wandering fancy of her royal master.

Mme. Claes was ill educated, a curious circumstance, but explainable enough in the daughter of a Spanish grandee. She could read and write, but until her parents took her from the convent where her girlhood was spent (that is to say, until she was twenty years old) she had read nothing but the works of religious ascetics. On her entrance into society, and for a little while after, she had been too eager for amusement to learn anything but the frivolous arts of the toilet; and later, she had been so deeply mortified by her ignorance that she never ventured to take any part in conversation, and was set down in consequence as an unin-

telligent girl. But one result of her neglected and mystical education had been that her natural capacities for thought and feeling had been unspoiled. In society she was as plain and uninteresting as an heiress; but for her husband she grew beautiful and thoughtful.

Balthazar made some attempt, it is true, in the early years of their marriage to teach his wife, so that she might not feel at a disadvantage in this way, but doubtless he was too late, for Josephine had no memory save that of the heart. She never forgot a syllable that he let fall concerning themselves; every least detail of their happy life was fresh in her mind, while yesterday's lesson was forgotten. This invincible ignorance might have brought about serious discords between many a husband and wife; but Mme. Claes's love for her husband was almost a religion, and the intuition of passionate love and desire to preserve her happiness had made her quick-witted. She so contrived matters that she always appeared to understand, and her ignorance was very seldom too apparent. Not only so, but when two love each other so well that every day seems for them the first day of their love, such vital happiness has a marvellous power of transforming the whole conditions of life. Does it not become like childhood, careless of everything that is not love or joy and laughter?

While the life stirs in us, and its fires burn fiercely, we let it burn unthriftily, nor set ourselves to measure the means or the end. For the rest, Mme. Claes understood her position as a wife better than any daughter of Eve. Her character was a piquant combination of Spanish pride with the submissiveness of the Flamande which makes the domestic hearth so attractive. She was dignified; she could command respect by a glance which revealed a consciousness of her own value and her high descent, but before Claes she trembled. She had set her husband so on high, so near to God, that the thought of what he would say or think controlled her every thought or action, and her love had come to have a tinge of awe which heightened it. She had made

it a point of honor to maintain the old Flemish bourgeois traditions of the house; she had prided herself on the plenty and comfort of her housekeeping, on the classic cleanliness of every detail; everything must be of the best, every dish at dinner must be exquisitely cooked and served. She so ruled things in her household that all their outer life was in harmony with the life of the heart.

They had two boys and two girls. The oldest child, a girl named Marguerite, was born in 1796; the youngest, a three-year-old boy, they had called Jean Balthazar. Motherly love was almost as strong in Mme. Claes as her affection for her husband. Sometimes, especially in the last years of her life, there was a cruel struggle between love for her husband and love for her children, when two claims upon her heart so nearly equal had become in some sort antagonistic. This was the domestic drama hidden away in the sleepy old house, and in the scene with which the story opens her tears and the anguish on her face were caused by a fear that she had sacrificed her children to her husband.

In 1805 Mme. Claes's brother had died leaving no children. His sister, according to Spanish law, could not inherit the estates, which passed with the title to the heir-at-law; but the duke had left to her about sixty thousand ducats, and the representative of the younger branch of the house did not challenge the will. No thought of interest had ever mingled with their love; yet Josephine found a certain satisfaction in the thought that her fortune now equalled that of her husband, and was glad that in her turn she brought something to him from whom she had been generously content to receive everything. So it chanced that Balthazar's marriage, which prudent people had condemned, turned out to be a good match from a worldly point of view.

It was a sufficiently difficult problem to know what to do with the money. The Maison Claes was so rich in treasures of art, in pictures and valuable furniture, that it was scarcely possible to find anything worthy of being added to such a collection, formed by the taste of their ancestors. The noble

collection of pictures had been begun by one generation and completed by those that followed, a love of art having thus become a family tradition. There were fifty paintings in the state apartments on the first floor, and in the long gallery which connected those rooms with the quarter in which the family lived there were more than a hundred famous pictures by Rubens, Ruysdael, Van Dyck, Terburg, Gerard Dow, Teniers, Mieris, Paul Potter, Wouverman, Rembrandt, Hobbema, Cranach, and Holbein. Three centuries of patient research had assembled them. Examples of the French and Italian schools were in the minority, but nevertheless they were all of them genuine and of capital importance.

Another generation had been amateurs of Oriental porcelain. Some Claes, long dead and gone, had been an enthusiastic collector of old furniture or of silver plate; Balthazar's own father, the last survivor of the once famous Dutch society, had bequeathed to his son one of the finest known collections of tulips; there was not a Claes but had left some trace of his ruling passion, and every Fleming is a born collector. The old house was superbly furnished with heirlooms, which represented vast sums of money. Without, it was as smooth and bare as a sea-shell, and like a shell it was decked within with fair colors and radiant mother-of-pearl.

Balthazar Claes also possessed a country house in the plain of Orchies. So far from adopting the French plan and living up to his income, he never spent more than one-fourth of it, following old Batavian usages. This put him on the same footing as the wealthiest persons in Douai, for their yearly expenditure never exceeded twelve hundred ducats.

In the days when the Civil Code became the law of the land, the wisdom of this course was abundantly evident. By virtue of the clause *des Successions*, which divides the estate in equal shares among the children, each child's share would have been small, and the treasures stored for so long in the house of Claes must have one day been dispersed. With his wife's concurrence Balthazar invested Mme. Claes's fortune

in such a manner as to secure to each of their children a position similar to that in which they had been brought up, and the house of Claes was still kept up on the old footing. They bought woods which had suffered somewhat in the recent wars, but which in ten years' time, with due care, were likely to increase enormously in value.

The society in which M. Claes moved consisted of the oldest families of Douai. His wife's noble qualities and character were so thoroughly appreciated that by a sort of tacit agreement the social regulations so stringently enforced in old-fashioned towns were somewhat relaxed in her case. During the winter months, which were always spent in Douai, she seldom left her house, and went very little into society—society came to her. She received every Wednesday, and gave three large dinner parties every month. It was generally recognized that Mme. Claes felt more at ease in her own house, and she herself was little inclined to leave it; her love for her husband and her children, whom she was bringing up very carefully, kept her at home.

Until the year 1809 there was no change in the ways of the household, thus privileged to form an exception to accepted social rules. The life of these two beings, with its hidden depths of love and joy, flowed on to all appearance like other lives. Balthazar Claes's passion for his wife, which she had known how to keep, seemed, as he himself said, to have determined his bent, and his innate perseverance was employed in the cultivation of happiness, as he had cultivated tulips in his youth; it absolved him from the necessity for a mania traditional in his family. But at the end of the year a change came over Balthazar; it came about so imperceptibly that at first Mme. Claes did not think it necessary to ask the reason of these ominous signs. One evening he seemed preoccupied as he went to bed, and she conscientiously respected his mood. Her woman's tact and habits of submission had always led her to wait for Balthazar's confidence; she felt far too sure of his affection to give way to jealousy. Yet though she knew that any inquiry would meet

with a prompt answer, the old impressions of early life had given her an instinctive dread of a rebuff. Her husband's moral malady went through many stages, and only by slow degrees did it assume an acute form, and grow so intolerably violent that at last the happiness of a whole household was destroyed. However engrossing Balthazar's thoughts might be, he was ready for many months to lay them aside to talk with her; and there was no alteration in his affection, his frequent silent moods were the only indications of the change that was being wrought in his character.

It was long before Mme. Claes gave up the hope that her husband would approach the subject himself and tell her about his mysterious preoccupations. Sometimes she thought that he was waiting until there should be some practical result of his labors; there is a kind of pride in so many men which leads them to fight their battles alone and to appear only as victors. In that day of triumph the light of happiness would shine all the more brightly for being withdrawn for a while, and Balthazar's love would fill up all the blank spaces in the page of life, blanks for which his heart was not to blame. Josephine knew her husband well enough to know that he would never forgive himself if he discovered that his Pepita's happiness had been overcast for so many months. So she kept silence, and felt it a kind of joy to suffer through him and for him; for in her passion there was a trace of the piety of the Spaniard, which can never distinguish between religion and love, and cannot understand a love without suffering. She waited for a return of affection, saying to herself every evening, "It will surely come to-morrow!" as if love were an absent wanderer. During all these secret troubles she was expecting her youngest child. There had been a horrible revelation of a wretched future. Everything seemed to draw her husband from her, and even in his love he was preoccupied. Her woman's pride, wounded for the first time, sounded the depths of the mysterious gulf which separated her from the Claes of their early married life. From that time things grew worse and

worse. Claes, who but lately had been immersed in family happiness, who played with his children for whole hours together at romping games on the carpet, in the parlor, or in the garden walks, who seemed as if he could only live beneath the dark eyes of his Pepita, did not notice his wife's condition, forgot to share in the family life, and seemed to forget his own existence.

The longer Mme. Claes delayed to ask the reason of his preoccupation, the more her courage failed her. Her blood seemed to boil at the thought, and her voice died in her throat. At last she felt convinced that her husband had ceased to care for her, and grew seriously alarmed. This dread grew upon her; she brooded over it till her hours were filled with unhappy musings and feverish excitement, and she began to despair. She justified Balthazar at her own expense, telling herself that she was old and ugly. Then it seemed to her that she saw a generous motive, humiliating though it might be to her pride, in his absorption in his work; it was a kind of negative faithfulness; she determined to give him back his independence by bringing about a secret divorce, that clew to the apparent happiness of not a few households. Yet before renouncing their old life, she made an effort to read her husband's heart—and found it shut.

She saw how Balthazar, by slow degrees, became indifferent to everything that had once been dear to him; he cared no longer for his tulips in flower; he seemed to have forgotten the very existence of his children. Clearly this passion was one of those that lie without the pale of the heart's affections, but which no less, as women think, dry up the springs of affection. Love slept, but had not fled. This was some comfort, though the trouble itself remained as heretofore; and hope, the explanation of all situations like these, prolonged the crisis.

Sometimes, just as the poor wife's despair had grown to such a pitch that she had gathered courage to question her husband, there would be a brief interval of happiness, and Balthazar would make it clear to her that though he might

be in the clutches of some diabolical thought, it was a thought which still permitted him to be himself again at times. In these brief moments, when her sky grew brighter, she was too eager to enjoy the gleam of happiness, too afraid to lose any of it by her importunity, to ask for an explanation; and just as she nerved herself to speak, he would escape her. While the words were on her lips, Balthazar would suddenly leave her, or he would fall into deep musings from which nothing could arouse him.

Before very long there set in a reaction of the mental on the physical existence. The havoc thus wrought was scarcely visible at first, save to the eyes of a loving woman, who watched for a clew to her husband's inmost thoughts in their slightest manifestations. She could often scarcely keep back the tears as she saw him fling himself down after dinner into an easy-chair by the fireside, and sit there with his eyes fixed on one of the dark panels, gloomy, abstracted, utterly heedless of the dead silence about him. She watched, too, with an aching heart the gradual changes for the worse in the face that love had made sublime for her; it seemed as if the life of the soul was day by day withdrawing itself and leaving an expressionless mask. At times his eyes grew glassy, as if the faculty of sight in them had been converted to a power of inner vision. After the children had gone to bed, after long silent hours full of painful and solitary brooding, poor Pepita would venture to ask, "Do you feel ill, dear?" Sometimes Balthazar would not answer at all, or he came to himself with a start like a man suddenly awakened from sleep, and said, "No," in harsh, sepulchral tones, which fell heavily on his wife's quivering heart.

Josephine tried at first to keep this anomalous state of things in their household a secret from the outer world, but this proved to be impossible. Balthazar's behavior was known and discussed in every coterie, in every salon; and, as frequently happens in little towns, certain circles were better informed as to the Claes's affairs than Mme. Claes herself. Several of her friends broke through the silence pre-

scribed by politeness, and showed so much solicitude on her account that she hastened to explain her husband's singular conduct.

"M. Balthazar," she said, "was engaged on a great work. It took up all his time and energies; but if it succeeded, it would make him famous, and his native town would have reason to be proud of him."

Patriotic enthusiasm runs high in Douai; you would be hard put to it to find a town more eager for distinction; the prospect of glory was gratifying to local vanity; there was a reaction in people's minds, and M. Claes's proceedings were viewed more respectfully.

His wife's guesses were not so very far from the truth. Workmen had been employed for some time past in the garret above the state apartments, whither Balthazar went every morning. He spent more and more of his time up there now, until at last he was in the garret all day long, and his wife and the rest of the family fell in with the new ways by degrees.

But Mme. Claes had yet to learn, to her unspeakable anguish, that her husband was always buying scientific apparatus in Paris, that books, machines, and costly materials of all kinds were being sent to him; and that he was bent on discovering the Philosopher's Stone. All this she must hear through the officious kindness of friends who were surprised to find her in ignorance of her husband's doings. It was a bitter humiliation. These friends proceeded to say that she ought to think of her children and of her own future, and that she would be doing very wrong if she did not use her influence with her husband to turn him from the paths of error into which he had strayed. Mme. Claes might summon a great lady's insolence to her aid, and silence this absurd talk; but a sudden terror seized her in spite of her confident tone, and she determined that she would no longer efface herself. She would choose her ground, and speak to her husband on an equal footing; and so, feeling less tremulous, she ventured to ask Balthazar for the cause of the

change in him and the reason of his continual seclusion. The Fleming frowned as he answered her—"My dear, you would not understand it in the least."

One day Josephine had begged hard to know this secret, playfully grumbling that she who shared his life might not share all his thoughts.

"If you want to know about it so much," Balthazar answered, seeing his wife on her knees, "I will tell you. I am studying chemistry," he said, stroking her black hair, "and I am the happiest man in the world."

Two years after the winter in which M. Claes began his experiments, the house was no longer the same. Perhaps the chemist's abstracted ways had given offence; perhaps his acquaintances felt themselves to be in the way; or it may have been that the anxieties of which Mme. Claes never spoke had altered her, and people found her less charming than heretofore. Whatever the cause might be, she only received visits from her most intimate friends, and Balthazar went nowhere. He shut himself up in his laboratory all day, and sometimes all night; his family never saw him except at dinner. After the second year the winter and summer were alike spent in Douai; his wife had no desire to leave Balthazar and go alone to their country house.

Balthazar would take long solitary walks, sometimes only returning on the following day. Those were long nights of sickening anxiety for his wife. In Douai, as in most fortified towns, the gates of the city were shut at a fixed hour; when search and inquiry within the walls had been made in vain, poor Mme. Claes had not even the support of expectation, half hope, half anguish, and must wait till morning as best she might. And in the morning Balthazar would return as if nothing had happened. He had simply forgotten, in his abstraction, the hour at which the gates were closed, and had no suspicion of the torture which he had inflicted on his family. The joy and relief were nearly as perilous for Mme. Claes as terror and suspense had been. She made no comment; she never spoke to him of his wanderings. Once

she had begun to ask a question, and she had not forgotten the tone of amazement in which he answered—"Why, cannot one take a walk?"

The passions cannot be deceived. Mme. Claes's own misgivings bore witness to the truth of the reports which she had at first so lightly contradicted. She had suffered so much from polite conventional sympathy in her youth that she had no wish to experience it a second time. She therefore immured herself more closely than ever in her home, her acquaintances dropped off, and her few remaining friends soon followed suit.

Balthazar's slovenly attire was by no means the least of her troubles. There is always something degrading in neglect of this kind for a man who belongs to the upper classes; and she felt it all the more keenly, because she had been used to a Flemish refinement of cleanliness. With the help of Lemulquinier, her husband's valet, Josephine tried for a while to repair the havoc wrought by these pursuits; but the new garments with which, without Claes's knowledge, she replaced the torn, burned and stained clothing, were little better than rags by the end of the day, and she gave up the attempt in despair.

After fifteen years of happiness, it seemed to the wife, who had never known a pang of jealousy, that she counted for nothing in the heart where she had reigned but lately, and the Spaniard in her nature awoke. Science was her rival. Science had won her husband's heart from her, and love renewed its strength in the fires of jealousy that consumed her heart. But what could she do? What resistance could she make against this slowly growing tyrannous power that never relaxed its hold? this invisible rival who could not be slain? A woman's power is limited by nature; how can she engage in a struggle with an Idea, with the infinite delights of thought and charms that are always renewed? What could she attempt in the face of the coquetries of ideas which take new forms and grow fairer amid difficulties, which beckon to the seeker, and lure

him on so far from the world that he grows forgetful of all things else, and human love and human ties are as nothing to him?

A day came at last when, in spite of strict orders from Balthazar, his wife determined that at least in bodily presence she would be near him; she also would live in the garret where he had shut himself up, and meet her rival there on her own ground and at close quarters; she would be with her husband during the long hours which he lavished on the terrible mistress who had won his heart from her. She meant to steal into the mysterious workshop, and to earn the right of remaining there. But as she dreaded an explosion of wrath, and feared a witness of the scene, she waited for a day when her husband should be alone, before making her effort to share with Lemulquinier the right of entry into the laboratory. For some time she had watched the man's comings and goings, and almost hated him. Was it not intolerable that the servant should know all that she longed to learn, all that her husband hid from her, and that she did not dare to ask? It seemed to her that Lemulquinier was more privileged, and stood higher in her husband's estimation, than she, his own wife.

So she went to the garret, trembling, yet almost happy, and for the first time in her life was made to feel Balthazar's anger. Scarcely had she opened the door when he rushed forward and seized her, and pushed her out on to the staircase so roughly that she narrowly escaped a headlong fall.

"God be praised! You are still alive!" cried Balthazar, as he helped her to rise.

The splinters of a shattered glass mask fell about Mme. Claes; she looked up and saw her husband's face, white, haggard, and terrified.

"Dear, I told you not to come here," he gasped, sinking down on a step as if all his strength had left him. "The saints have saved your life. I wonder how it chanced that

my eyes were fixed on the door just then. We were all but killed!"

"I should have been very happy to die so," she said.

"My experiment is utterly ruined," Balthazar went on. "I could not forgive any one else for causing me such a grievous disappointment; it is too painful. In another moment I should perhaps have decomposed nitrogen! . . . There, go back to your own affairs," and Balthazar returned to his laboratory.

"*I should perhaps have decomposed nitrogen!*" the poor wife said to herself, as she went back to her own room; and, once there, she burst into tears.

The phrase conveyed no meaning to her. Men, whose education gives them a certain readiness to deal with new ideas, do not know how painful it is to a woman to lack the power to understand the thoughts of the man she loves. These divine creatures are more indulgent than we are; they do not tell us when they fail to find response to the language of their souls; they shrink from making us feel the superiority of their sentiments, dissemble their pain joyfully, and are silent about the pleasures that we do not enter into. But they are more ambitious in love than we are; they must do more than wed a man's heart, they must share his thoughts as well. Ignorance of her husband's scientific pursuits gave Mme. Claes a more intolerable heartache than a rival's beauty could have caused. The woman who loves the most is at least conscious of this advantage over her rival; but such neglect as this left her face to face with her utter helplessness; it was a humiliating indifference to all the affections that help us to live.

Josephine loved, but she did not know; and her want of knowledge separated her from her husband. But besides this and beyond this, there lay a last extremity of torture; he was often between life and death, it seemed; under the same roof, and yet far from her, he was risking his life without her knowledge, in dangers which she might not share. It was like hell—a prison for the soul from which

there was no way of escape, where there was no hope left. Mme. Claes determined that at any rate she would learn in what the attractions of this science consisted, and privately set herself to read works on chemistry. Then the house became like a convent.

The "Maison Claes" had passed through all these successive changes, and by the time that this story commences was almost "dead to the world."

The crisis grew more complicated. Like all impassioned natures, Mme. Claes never thought of herself; and those who know love, know that where affection is concerned money is of small moment, and interest and affection are almost incompatible. Yet it was not without a cruel pang that Josephine learned that there was a mortgage of three hundred thousand francs on her husband's estates. There were documents which proved this beyond a doubt, and gave occasion for gossip and dismayed conjecture in the town. Mme. Claes, justly alarmed, felt compelled, proud though she was, to make inquiries of her husband's notary, to confide her anxieties to him, or to enable him to guess them; and was forced to hear from the lips of the man of business the humiliating inquiry—"Then has not M. Claes as yet said anything to you about it?"

Luckily, Balthazar's notary was almost a relation. M. Claes's grandfather had married one of the Pierquins of Antwerp, of the same family as the Pierquins of Douai; and ever since the marriage the latter branch, though scarcely acquainted with the Claes, had looked upon them as cousins. M. Pierquin, a young man of six-and-twenty, had just succeeded to his father's position; he alone, in his quality of notary and kinsman, had the right of entry to the house. Mme. Balthazar Claes had lived for many months in such complete seclusion that she was obliged to go to him for information of a disaster which was already known to every one in Douai.

Pierquin told her that in all probability large sums were owing to the firm which supplied her husband with chemi-

cals. This firm, after making inquiries, had executed all M. Claes's orders without hesitation, and let him have unlimited credit. Mme. Claes commissioned Pierquin to ask them for an account of the goods supplied to her husband. Two months later, MM. Protez and Chiffreville, manufacturing chemists, sent in a statement by which it appeared that a hundred thousand francs were owing to them.

Mme. Claes and Pierquin studied the document with amazement that increased with each fresh item. Among enigmatical entries, commercial expressions, and undecipherable scientific hieroglyphs, it gave them a shock to find mention of diamonds and precious metals, albeit in small quantities, and of mysterious substances, apparently so difficult to procure or to produce that they were enormously valuable. The vast number of different items, the cost of carriage and of packing valuable scientific instruments and delicately adjusted machinery for transit, the expense of all the apparatus, together with the fact that many of the chemical compounds had been specially prepared by M. Claes's directions, accounted sufficiently for the startling amount of the total.

In the interests of his cousin, the notary made inquiries concerning MM. Protez and Chiffreville, and the accounts which he received of them convinced him that they had been perfectly honest in their dealings with M. Claes; indeed, they had been more than honest, they had gone out of their way to keep him informed of the discoveries of Parisian chemists in order to save him expense.

Mme. Claes entreated Pierquin to keep the singular nature of these transactions a secret. If they were known in the town, all Douai would say at once that her husband was mad. But Pierquin told her that this was impossible; that he had obtained all possible delay already; and that as the bills for such large amounts had been formally noted, the secret was not in his keeping. He laid bare the whole extent of the wound, telling his cousin that if she could not contrive to prevent her husband from squandering his money in

this reckless way, the family estates would be mortgaged up to their value in less than six months. As to making any effort himself, he added that he, Pierquin, had spoken to his cousin on the subject, with due deference, more than once, and that it had been utterly useless. Balthazar had answered once for all that in all his researches his object was to make a fortune and a famous name for his family. So in addition to the anguish which had clutched at Josephine's heart for the past two years—a cumulative torture, in which every sad or happy memory of the past added to the pain of the present—she was to know a horrible unceasing dread of worse to follow, of an appalling future.

A woman's presentiments are often marvellously correct. How is it that women fear so far oftener than they hope in all matters relating to this present life? Why do they reserve all their faith for religious beliefs in a future world? How is it that they are so quick to discern coming trouble or any turning-point in our career? Perhaps the very closeness of the tie that binds a woman to the man she loves makes her an admirable judge of his capacity and with the instinct of love she estimates his faculties and knows his tastes, his passions, his faults, and good qualities. She is always studying these sources of man's destiny, and with the intimate knowledge of the causes comes the fatal gift of foreseeing their effects under all conceivable conditions. Women derive their insight into the Future from their clear-sightedness in such things as they see in the Present, and the accuracy of their forecasts is due to the perfection of their nervous organization, which enables them to detect and interpret the slightest sign of thought or feeling. They feel the great storms that shake another soul, and every fibre in them vibrates in harmony. They feel or they see. And Mme. Claes, though estranged from her husband for two years, felt that the loss of their fortune was impending.

In Balthazar's passionate persistence she had seen the reflection of his fiery enthusiasm. If it were true that he was trying to discover the secret of making gold, he would

certainly fling his last morsel of bread into the crucible with perfect indifference; but what was he seeking to discover?

So far she had loved husband and children without attempting to distinguish the claims of either upon her heart. Balthazar had loved the children as she did; the children had never come between them. Now, all at once she discovered that she was at times more a mother than a wife, as heretofore she had been a wife rather than a mother. Yet she felt that she was ready even yet to sacrifice herself, her fortune, and her children to the welfare of the man who had loved and chosen and adored her, the man for whom she was still the only woman in the world; and then came remorse that she should love her children so little, and despair at being placed between two hideous alternatives. Her heart suffered as a wife, as a mother she suffered in her children, and as a Christian she suffered for it all. She said nothing of the terrible conflict in her soul. After all, her husband was the sole arbiter of their fate; he was the master who must shape their destinies; he was accountable to God and to none other. How could she reproach him with putting her fortune to such uses, after the disinterestedness which had been so amply proved during the first ten years of their married life? Was she a judge of his designs? And yet her conscience asserted what she knew to be in keeping with all laws written and unwritten, that parents possess their fortune not for themselves, but for their children, and have no right to alienate the worldly wealth which they hold in trust for them.

Rather than take it upon herself to solve these intricate problems, she had chosen to shut her eyes to them; like a man on the brink of a precipice, who will not look into the yawning depths into which he knows that he must sooner or later fall.

For the past six months her husband had allowed her nothing for housekeeping expenses. The magnificent diamonds which her brother had given to her on the day of her marriage had been secretly sold in Paris, and she had put

the whole household on the most economical footing. She had dismissed the children's governess, and even little Jean's nurse. Formerly the luxury of a carriage had been quite unknown among the Flemish burghers, who lived so simply and held their heads so high. So there had been no provision in the Maison Claes itself for this modern innovation, and Balthazar had been obliged to have his stables and coach-house on the opposite side of the street. Since he had been absorbed in chemistry he had ceased to superintend that part of the ménage, essentially a man's province, and Mme. Claes put down the carriage. She was so much of a recluse that the expense was as useless as it was heavy; and this would have been reason sufficient to give for her retrenchments, but she did not attempt to give color to them by any pretexts. Hitherto, facts had given the lie to her words, and now silence became her best.

Such changes as these, moreover, were almost inexcusable in Holland, where any one who lives up to his income is looked on as a madman. Only as her oldest girl, Marguerite, was now nearly sixteen years old, Josephine would wish her to make a great match, it was thought, and to establish her in the world in a manner befitting the daughter of the House of Claes, connected as it was with the Molinas, the Van Ostrom-Temnincks, and the Casa-Reals. The money realized by the sale of the diamonds had been exhausted some few days before the opening scene of this story. On that very afternoon, as Mme. Claes had met Pierquin on her way to vespers with her children, he had turned and walked with them as far as the Church of Saint Pierre, talking confidentially the while.

"It would be a breach of the friendship which attaches me to your family," he said, "if I were to attempt to conceal from you, cousin, the risks you are running. I must implore you to set them before your husband. Who else has influence sufficient to arrest him on the brink of the precipice? Your estates are so heavily mortgaged that they will scarcely pay interest on the sums borrowed. At this mo-

ment you have no income whatever. If you once cut down the woods, your last hope of salvation will be gone. Cousin Balthazar owes thirty thousand francs to Protez and Chiffreville in Paris; how will you pay them? How are you going to live? And what will become of you if Claes keeps on buying acids and alkalies, and glassware, and voltaic batteries, and such like gimcracks? All your fortune has flown off in gas and smuts; you have nothing but the house and the furniture left. A couple of days ago there was some talk of mortgaging the house itself, and what do you think Claes said?—'The devil!'—'Tis the first sign of sense he has shown these three years."

Mme. Claes in her distress clutched Pierquin's arm. "Keep our secret!" she entreated, raising her eyes to heaven.

The words had fallen like a thunderbolt. She sat quietly on her chair among her children, so overcome that she could not pray. Her prayer book lay open on her knee, but she never turned a leaf; her painful thoughts were as all-absorbing as her husband's musings. The sounds of the organ fell on her ears, but Spanish pride and Flemish integrity sent louder echoes through her soul. The ruin of her children was complete! She could no longer hesitate between their claims and their father's honor. The immediate prospect of a collision with Claes appalled her; he was so great in her eyes, so much above her, that the bare idea of his anger was scarcely less fearful than the thought of the wrath of God. She could no longer be so devoutly submissive, a change had come over her life. For her children's sake she must thwart the wishes of the husband whom she idolized.

His thoughts soared among the far-off heights of science, but she must bring him down to the problems of every-day existence; must break in upon his dreams of a fair future, and confront him with the present in its most prosaic aspect, with practical details revolting to artists and great men. For his wife, Balthazar Claes was a giant intellect, a man whose greatness the world would one day recognize; he could only

have forgotten her for the most splendid hopes; and then he was so able, so wise and far-seeing, she had heard him speak so well on so many subjects, that she felt no doubt that he spoke the truth when he said that his researches were to bring fame and a fortune to them all. His love for his wife and children was not only great, it was boundless; how could such love come to an end? Doubtless it was stronger and deeper than ever, it was only the form that was changed; and she who was so nobly disinterested, so generous and sensitive, must continually sound the word "money" in the great man's ears; must make him see poverty in its ugliest shape, and the rattle of coin and cries of distress must break in on the sweet voices that sang of fame.

And suppose that Balthazar's affection for her should grow less? Ah! if she had had no children, how bravely and gladly she would have faced the change he had wrought in her destiny! Women who have been brought up amid wealthy surroundings soon feel the emptiness of the life that luxury may disguise, but cannot fill; it palls on them, but their hearts are not seared; and when once they have discovered for themselves the happiness that lies in a constant interchange of sincere feeling and thought, when they are certain of being loved, they do not shrink from a narrow monotonous existence, if only that existence is the one best suited to the being who loves them. All their own ideas and pleasures are subordinated to the lightest demands of that life without their own; and the future holds but one dread for them—the dread of separation.

At this moment Pepita felt that her children stood between her and her real life, as science had separated Balthazar Claes from her. When she returned from vespers she flung herself down in her low chair, dismissed the children with a caution to make no noise, and sent to ask her husband to come to speak with her; but in spite of the insistence of the old man-servant Lemulquinier, Balthazar had not stirred from his laboratory. Mme. Claes had time to think over her position, and had fallen into deep musings,

forgetful of the hour and the day. The thought that they owed thirty thousand francs which they could not pay roused painful memories; all the troubles of the past started up to meet the troubles of the present and the future. She was overwhelmed by the problem, the burden grew too heavy for her, and she gave way to tears.

When Balthazar came at last, he looked more abstracted, more formidable, more distraught than she had ever seen him; and when he gave her no answer, she sat for a while like one fascinated by the vacant unseeing gaze; the remorseless thoughts that had wrung drops of sweat from his brow seemed to exert a spell over her also. With the first shock came the wish that she might die. But the scientific inquiry made in those absent tones roused her courage just as her heart began to fail her; she would grapple with this hideous and mysterious power which had robbed her of her lover, her children of their father, and the family of their wealth, and had overclouded all their happiness. Yet she could not help trembling, shudder after shudder ran through her; was it not the most solemn moment of her life—a moment that held all her future—as it was the outcome of all her past?

And at this point, weak-minded people, timid souls, or those who, sensitive by nature, are prone to exaggerate little trials of life, men who, in spite of themselves, feel a nervous tremor when they stand before the arbiters of their fate, may readily imagine the thoughts that crowded up in her mind. Her brain reeled, and her heart grew heavy with pent-up emotion, as she saw her husband go slowly toward the garden door. Few women have not known the misery of such inward debates as hers, so that even those whose hearts have not throbbed violently over a confession of extravagance, or of debts to their dressmaker, will have some faint idea of how terribly the pulse beats when life is at stake. A pretty woman can fling herself at her husband's feet, the graceful attitudes of her sorrow can plead for her, but Mme. Claes was painfully conscious of her deformity, and this added to her fears. When she saw Balthazar about to leave her, her

first impulse had been to spring to his side, but a cruel thought restrained her. How could she rise and stand before him? She would appear ridiculous in the eyes of a man who had lost the old illusions of love, and now would see her as she was. Rather than lose one tittle of her power, Josephine would have lost fortune and children. She would avoid all possible evil influences at this crisis.

"Balthazar!"

He started at the sound of her voice and coughed. Then, without paying any attention to his wife, he turned in the direction of one of the small square spittoons which are placed at intervals along the wainscot in all Dutch and Flemish houses; the force of old habit and association was so strong in him that the man, who was hardly conscious of the existence of human beings, was always careful of the furniture. This curious trait was a source of intolerable pain to poor Josephine, who could not understand it; at this moment she lost command over herself, and her agony of mind drew from her a sharp cry of suffering, an exclamation in which all her wounded feelings found expression.

"Monsieur! I am speaking to you!"

"What does that signify?" answered Balthazar, turning round abruptly, and giving his wife a quick glance. The hasty words fell like a thunderbolt.

"Forgive me, dear . . ." she said, with a white face. She tried to rise to her feet, and held out her hand to him, but sank back again exhausted.

"This is killing me!" she said, in a voice broken by sobs.

The sight of tears brought a revulsion in Balthazar, as in most absent-minded people; it was as if a sudden light had been thrown for him on the mystery of this crisis. He took up Mme. Claes at once in his arms, opened a door which led into the little antechamber, and sprang up the staircase so hastily that his wife's dress caught on one of the carved dragon's heads of the balusters; there was a sharp sound, and a whole breadth was torn away. He kicked open the

door of a little room into which their apartments opened, and found that the door of his wife's room was locked. He set Josephine gently down in an armchair, saying to himself, "Good heavens! where is the key?"

"Thank you, dear," said Mme. Claes, as she opened her eyes. "It is a long while since I have felt so near to your heart."

"Great heavens!" cried Claes. "Where is the key? There are the servants—"

Josephine signed to him to take the key which hung suspended from a ribbon at her side. Balthazar opened the door and hastily laid his wife on the sofa; then he went out to bid the startled servants remain downstairs, ordered them to serve dinner at once, and hurried back to his wife.

"What is it, dear heart?" he asked, seating himself beside her. He took her hand and kissed it.

"It is nothing," she said; "the pain is over now, only I wish that I had God's power, and could pour all the gold in the world at your feet."

"Why gold?" he asked, as he drew his wife to him, held her tightly in his arms, and kissed her again on the forehead. "Dearest love, do you not give me the greatest of all wealth, loving me as you do?"

"Oh! Balthazar, why should you not put an end to all this wretchedness, as your voice just now dispelled the trouble in my heart? You are not changed at all; I see that now."

"Wretchedness? What do you mean, dearest?"

"We are ruined, dear."

"Ruined?" he echoed. He began to smile, and fondly stroked the hand which lay in his. When he spoke again there was an unaccustomed tenderness in his voice.

"To-morrow, dearest, we may find ourselves possessed of inexhaustible wealth. Yesterday, while trying to discover far greater secrets, I think I found out how to crystallize carbon, the substance of the diamond. . . . Oh!

dear wife, in a few days' time you will forgive me for my wandering wits; for they are apt to wander at times, it seems. I spoke hastily just now, did I not? But you will make allowances for me, the thought of you is always present with me, and my work is all for you, for us—"

"That is enough," she said; "we will say no more now, dear. This evening we will talk over it all. My trouble seemed more than I could bear, and now joy is almost too much for me."

She had not thought to see the old tender expression in his face, to hear such gentle tones again in his voice, to recover all that she thought she had lost.

"Certainly," he said. "Let us talk it over this evening. If I should grow absorbed in something else, remind me of my promise. I should like to forget my calculations this evening, and to surround myself with family happiness, with the pleasures of the heart, for I need them, Pepita, I am longing for them."

"And will you tell me what you are trying to discover, Balthazar?"

"Why, you would not understand it at all if I did, poor little one."

"That is what you think? But for these four months past I have been reading about chemistry, dear, so that I could talk about it with you. I have read Fourcroy, Lavoisier, Chaptal, Nollet, Rouelle, Berthollet, Gay-Lussac, Spallanzani, Leuwenhoek, Galvani, Volta—all the books in fact about this science that you adore. Come, you can tell me your secrets now."

"Oh! you are an angel!" cried Balthazar, falling on his knees beside his wife, and shedding tears that made her tremble. "We shall understand each other in everything!"

"Ah!" she said. "I would fling myself into your furnace fire to hear such words from you, to see you as you are now."

She heard her daughter's footsteps in the next room, and sprang hastily to the door.

"What is it, Marguerite?" she asked of her eldest girl.

"M. Pierquin is here, mother dear. You forgot to give out the table-linen this morning, and if he stays to dinner—"

Mme. Claes drew a bunch of small keys from her pocket and gave them to her daughter, indicating as she did so the cupboards of foreign woods which lined the antechamber.

"Take it from the Graindorge linen," she said, "on the right-hand side."

"As this dear Balthazar of mine is to come back to me to-day, I should like to have him all complete," she said, going back to the room with mischievous sweetness in her eyes. "Now, dear, go to your room, and do me a favor—dress for dinner, as Pierquin is here. Just change those ragged clothes of yours. Only look at the stains! And is it muriatic or sulphuric acid which has burned those holes with the yellow edges? Go and freshen yourself up a little; as soon as I have changed my dress, I will send Mulquinier to you."

Balthazar tried to pass into his room by the door which opened into it, forgetting that it was locked on the other side. He was obliged to go out through the antechamber.

"Marguerite," called Mme. Claes, "leave the linen on the armchair there, and come and help me to dress; I would rather not have Martha."

Balthazar had laid his hand on Marguerite's shoulder, and turned her toward him, saying merrily—"Good-evening, little one! You are very charming to-day in that muslin frock and rose-colored sash."

He grasped Marguerite's hand in his, and kissed her forehead.

"Mamma!" cried the girl, as she went into her mother's room, "papa kissed me just now, and he looked so pleased and happy!"

"Your father is a very great man, dear child; he has been working for three years that his family may be rich and illustrious, and now he feels sure that he has reached

the end of his ambitions. To-day should be a great day for us all."

"We shall not be alone in our joy, mamma dear; all the servants were sorry, too, to see him look so gloomy. . . . Oh! not that sash, it is so limp and faded."

"Very well, but we must be quick. I must go down and speak to Pierquin. Where is he?"

"In the parlor; he is playing with Jean."

"Where are Gabriel and Félicie?"

"I hear their voices out in the garden."

"Well, then, just run away downstairs and see after them, or they will pick the tulips; your father has not even seen the tulips all this year, perhaps he would like to go out and look at them after dinner. And tell Mulquinier to take everything your father wants up to his room."

When Marguerite had left her, Mme. Claes went to the window and looked out at her children playing below in the garden. They were absorbed in watching one of those gleaming insects with green, gold-bespangled wings that are popularly called "diamond beetles."

"Be good, my darlings," she said, throwing up the window sash to let the fresh air into the room. Then she tapped gently on the door that opened into her husband's apartment, to make sure that he was not lost once more in a waking dream. He opened it, and when she saw that he was dressing, she said merrily—"You will not leave me to entertain Pierquin all by myself for long, will you? You will come down as soon as you can?" and she tripped away downstairs so lightly that a stranger hearing her footsteps would not have thought that she was lame. Half-way down the staircase, she met Lemulquinier.

"When Monsieur carried Madame upstairs," said the man, "her dress was torn by one of the balusters; not that the scrap of stuff matters at all, but the dragon's head is broken, and I do not know who is to mend it. It quite spoils the staircase; such a handsome piece of carving as it was, too!"

"Pshaw! Mulquinier, do not have it mended; it is not a misfortune."

"Not a misfortune?" said Mulquinier to himself. "How is that? What has happened? Can the master have discovered the Absolute?"

"Good-day, M. Pierquin," said Mme. Claes, as she opened the parlor door.

The notary hastened to offer his arm to his cousin, but she never took any arm but her husband's, and thanked him by a smile, as she said, "Perhaps you have come for the thirty thousand francs?"

"Yes, madame. When I reached home I found a memorandum from MM. Protez and Chiffreville, who have drawn six bills, each for five thousand francs, on M. Claes."

"Very well," she answered; "say nothing to-day about it to Balthazar. Stay and dine with us; and if he should happen to ask why you have called, please invent some plausible excuse. Let me have the letter; I will tell him about this affair myself. It will be all right," she went on, seeing the notary's astonishment; "in a very few months my husband will probably pay back all the money which he has borrowed."

The last phrase was spoken in a low voice. The notary meanwhile watched Mlle. Claes, who was coming from the garden, followed by Gabriel and Félicie.

"I have never seen Mlle. Marguerite look so charming," he said.

Mme. Claes, sitting in her low chair, with little Jean on her knees, raised her face and looked from her daughter to the notary with seeming carelessness.

Pierquin was neither short nor tall, stout nor thin; he was good-looking in a commonplace way, with a discontented rather than melancholy expression; it was not a thoughtful face in spite of its vague dreaminess. He had a name for being a misanthrope, but he had an excellent appetite, and was too anxious to get on in the world to

stand very far aloof from it. He had a trick of gazing into space, an attitude of indifference, a carefully cultivated talent for silence, which seemed to indicate profound depths of character; but which, as a matter of fact, served to conceal the shallowness and insignificance of a notary whose whole mind was entirely absorbed by material interests. He was still sufficiently young to be emulous and ambitious; the prospect of marrying into the Claes family would have been quite enough to call forth all his zeal, even if he had had no ulterior motive in the shape of avarice, but he was not prepared to act a generous part until he knew his position exactly. When Claes seemed to be in a fair way to ruin himself, the notary grew stiff, curt, and uncompromising as an ordinary man of business; but as soon as he suspected that something after all might come of his cousin's work, he at once became affectionate, accommodating, almost officious; and yet he never sounded his own motives for these naive changes of manner. Sometimes he looked on Marguerite as an Infanta, a princess to whose hand a poor notary dared not aspire; sometimes she was only a penniless girl, who might think herself lucky if Pierquin condescended to make her his wife. He was a thorough provincial and a Fleming; there was no harm in him; but his transparent selfishness neutralized his better qualities, as his personal appearance was spoiled by his absurd affectations. As Mme. Claes looked at the notary she remembered the curt way in which he had spoken that day in the porch of St. Peter's Church, and noticed the change in his manner wrought by this evening's conversation. She read the thoughts in the depths of his heart, and gave a keen glance at her daughter, but evidently there was no thought of her cousin in the girl's mind. A few minutes were spent in discussing town talk, and then the master of the house came down from his room. His wife had heard him moving about in the room above with indescribable pleasure, his step was so quick and light that she pictured Claes grown youthful again, and awaited his coming with such eagerness that

in spite of herself a quiver of excitement thrilled her as he came down the staircase.

A moment later Balthazar entered, dressed in a costume of that day. His high boots, reaching almost to the knee, were carefully polished, the tops were turned down, leaving white silk stockings visible. He wore blue kerseymere breeches, fastened with gold buttons, a white-flowered waistcoat, and a blue dress-coat. He had shaved himself and combed and perfumed his hair, his nails had been pared, and his hands washed with so much care that any one who had seen him an hour before would hardly have recognized him again. Instead of an old man almost in his dotage, his wife and children and the notary beheld a man of forty, with an irresistible air of kindliness and courtesy. His face was thin and worn, but the hardness and sharpness of outline, which told a tale of weariness and strenuous labor, gave a certain air of refinement to his face.

"Good-day, Pierquin," said Balthazar Claes.

The chemist had become a father and husband again. He took up his youngest child and tossed him up and down.

"Just look at the youngster," he said to the notary. "Doesn't a pretty child like this make you wish you were married? Take my word for it, my dear boy, family pleasures make up for everything—Brr!" he cried, as Jean went up to the ceiling. "Down you come," and he set the child on the floor. Gleeful shrieks of laughter broke from the little one as he found himself so high in the air one moment and so low the next. The mother looked away lest any one might see how deeply she was moved by this game of play. It was such a little thing, yet it meant a revolution in her life.

"Now let us hear how you are getting on," said Balthazar, depositing his son upon the polished floor, and flinging himself into an easy-chair; but the little one ran to him at once; some glittering gold buttons peeped out above his father's high boots in a quite irresistible way

"You are a darling!" said his father, taking him in his

arms, "a Claes every inch of you! You run straight.—Well, Gabriel, and how is Père Morillon?" he said to his elder son, as he pinched the boy's ear. "Do you manage to hold your own manfully against exercises and Latin translations? Do you keep a good grip on your mathematics?"

Balthazar rose and went over to Pierquin with the courteous friendliness which was natural to him. "Perhaps you have something to ask me, my dear fellow?" he said, as he took the notary's arm and drew him out into the garden, adding as they went, "Come and have a look at my tulips."

Mme. Claes looked after her husband, and could scarcely control her joy. He looked so young, so kindly, so much himself again. She too rose from her chair, put her arm round her daughter's waist, and kissed her.

"Dear Marguerite," she said; "darling child, I love you more than ever to-day."

"Papa has not been so nice for a long, long time."

Lemulquinier came to announce that dinner was served Mme. Claes took Balthazar's arm before Pierquin could offer his a second time, and the whole family went into the dining-room.

Overhead the beams and rafters had been left visible in the vaulted ceiling, but the woodwork was cleaned and carefully polished once a year, and the intervening spaces were adorned with paintings. Tall oak sideboards lined the room, the more curious specimens of the family china were arranged on the tiers of shelves, the purple leather which covered the walls was stamped with designs in gold, representing hunting scenes. Here and there above the sideboards a group of foreign shells, or the bright-colored feathers of rare tropical birds, glowed against the sombre background.

The chairs were the square-shaped kind with twisted legs and low backs covered with fringed stuff which once were found in every household all over France and Italy. In one of these Rafael seated his "Madonna of the Chair." They had not been changed since the beginning of the sixteenth

century, and the framework was black with age, but the gold-headed nails shone as if they were new only yesterday, and the stuff, carefully renewed from time to time, was a rich deep red. The Flanders of the sixteenth century, with its Spanish innovations, seemed to have risen out of the past.

The wine flasks and decanters on the table preserved in their bulb-shaped outlines the grace and dignity of antique vases; the glasses were the same old-fashioned goblets with long, slender stems that are seen in old Dutch pictures. The English earthenware was decorated with colored figures in high relief, Wedgwood's ware and Palissy's designs. The silver was massive, square-sided, and richly ornamented; it was in a very literal sense family plate, for no two pieces were alike, and the rise and progress of the fortunes of the house of Claes might have been traced from its beginnings in the varying styles of these heirlooms.

It will readily be imagined that a Claes would make it a point of honor to have table-linen of the most magnificent kind, and the table-napkins were fringed in the Spanish fashion. The splendors locked away in the state apartments only came to light to grace festival days; their glories were never dimmed, so to speak, by familiarity. This was the linen, plate, and earthenware in daily use, and everything in the quarter of the house where the family lived bore the stamp of a patriarchal quaintness. Add one more charming detail to complete the picture—a vine clambering about the windows set them in a framework of green leaves.

"You are faithful to old traditions, madame," said Pierquin, as he received a plateful of thymy soup, in which there were small rissolettes made of meat and fried bread, according to the approved Dutch and Flemish recipe, "this is the kind of soup that always made part of the Sunday dinner in our father's time, it has been a standing dish in the Low Countries for ages, but I never meet with it now except here and in my uncle Des Raquet's house. Oh! stay a moment

though, old M. Savaron de Savarus at Tournai still takes a pride in having it served, but old Flemish ways are rapidly disappearing. Furniture must be *à la grecque* nowadays; there are classical bucklers, lances, helmets, and fasces on every mortal thing. Everybody is rebuilding his house, selling his old furniture, melting down his plate, or getting rid of it for Sèvres porcelain, which is nothing like as beautiful as old Dresden or Oriental china. Oh! I myself am a Fleming to the backbone. It goes to my heart to see coppersmiths buying up beautiful old furniture at the price of firewood for the sake of the metal in the wrought-incrusted copperwork, or the pewter inlaid in it. Society has a mind to change its skin, I suppose, but the changes are more than skin deep; we are losing the faculty of producing along with the old works of art. There is not time to do anything conscientiously when every one lives in such a hurry. The last time I was in Paris I was taken to see the pictures exhibited in the Louvre, and, upon my honor, they are only fit for fire-screens! Yards of canvas with no atmosphere, no depth of tone. Painters really seem to be afraid of their colors. And they intend, so they say, to upset our old school. . . . Heaven help them!"

"Our old masters used to study their pigments," said Balthazar; "they used to test them singly and in combinations, submitting them to the action of sunlight and rain. Yes, you are right; nowadays the material resources of art receive less attention than formerly."

Mme. Claes was not listening to the conversation. The notary's remark that china had come into fashion had set her thoughts wandering, and a bright idea had at once occurred to her. She would sell the massive silver plate which her brother had left her; perhaps in that way she might pay the thirty thousand francs.

Presently her husband's voice sounded through her musings. "Aha!" Balthazar was saying, "so they talk about my studies in Douai?"

"Yes," answered Pierquin, "everybody is wondering

what it is that you are spending so much money over. I heard the First President, yesterday, lamenting that a man of your ability should set out to find the philosopher's stone. I took it upon myself to reply that you were too learned not to know that it would be attempting the impossible, too good a Christian to image that you could prevail over God, and that a Claes was far too shrewd to give hard cash for powder of pimperlimpimp. Still I must confess that I share in the regret that is generally felt over your withdrawal from society. You really might be said to be lost to the town. Indeed, madame, you would have been pleased if you knew how highly every one spoke of you and of M. Claes."

"It was very kind of you to put a stop to such absurd reports, which would make me ridiculous if no worse came of it," answered Balthazar. "Oh! so the good folk of Douai think that I am ruined! Very good, my dear Pierquin, on our wedding day, in two months' time, I will give a fête on a splendid scale, which shall reinstate me in the esteem of our dear money-worshipping fellow-townsmen."

The color rushed into Mme. Claes's face; for the past two years the anniversary had been forgotten. This evening was an interval in Balthazar's life of enthusiasm which might be compared to one of those lucid moments in insanity when the powers of the mind shine with unwonted brilliance for a little while; never had there been such point and pith and sparkle in his talk, his manner to his children had never been more playfully tender, he was a father once more, and no festival could have given his wife such joy as this. Once more his eyes sought hers with a constant expression of sympathy in them; she felt a delicious consciousness that the same feeling and the same thought stirred in the depths of either heart.

Old Lemulquinier seemed to have grown young again; seldom, indeed, had he been known to be in such spirits. The change in his master's manner had even more significance for him than for his mistress. Mme. Claes was dream-

ing of happiness, but visions of fortune filled the old serving man's brain, and his hopes were high. He had been wont to help with the mechanical part of the work, and perhaps some words let fall by his master when an experiment had failed, and the end seemed further and further off, had not been lost on the servant. Perhaps he had become infected with his master's enthusiasm, or an innate faculty of imitation had led Lemulquinier to assimilate the ideas of those with whom he lived. He regarded his master with a half-superstitious awe and admiration in which there was a trace of selfishness. The laboratory was for him very much what a lottery-office is for many people—hope organized. Every night as he lay down he used to say to himself, "To-morrow, who knows but we may be rolling in gold?" And in the morning he awoke with a no less lively faith.

He was a thorough Fleming, as his name indicated. In past ages the common people were distinguished merely by nicknames; a man was called after the place he came from, after his trade, or after some moral quality or personal trait. But when one of the people was enfranchised, his nickname became his family name, and was transmitted to his burgher descendants. In Flanders, dealers in flax thread were called *mulquiniers;* and the old valet's ancestor, who passed from serfdom into the burgher class, had, doubtless, dealt in linen thread. That had been some generations ago, and now the grandson of the dealer in flax was reduced to the old condition of servitude, albeit, unlike his grandsire, he received wages. The history of Flanders, its flax trade, its industries, and its commerce was in a manner epitomized in the old servant, who was often called Mulquinier for the sake of euphony.

There was something quaint in his appearance and character. In person he was tall and thin; his broad, triangular countenance had been so badly scarred by the smallpox that the white shiny seams gave it a grotesque appearance; the little tawny eyes, which exactly matched the color of his sleek, sandy peruke, seemed to look askance at everything. He

stalked solemnly and mysteriously about the house; his whole bearing and manner excused the curiosity which he awakened. It was believed, moreover, that as an assistant in the laboratory he shared and kept his master's secrets, and he was in consequence invested with a sort of halo of romance. Dwellers in the Rue de Paris watched him, as he came and went, with an interest not unmixed with awe; for when questioned he was wont to deliver himself of Delphic utterances, and to throw out vague hints of fabulous wealth. He was proud of being necessary to his master, and exercised, on the strength of it, a petty tyranny over his fellow-servants, taking advantage of his position to make himself master below stairs. Unlike Flemish servants, who become greatly attached to the family they serve, he cared for no one in the house but Balthazar; Mme. Claes might be in trouble, some piece of good fortune might befall the household, but it was all one to Lemulquinier, who ate his bread and butter and drank his beer with an unmoved countenance.

After dinner, Mme. Claes suggested that they should take coffee in the garden beside the centre bed of tulips. The flowers had been carefully labelled and planted in pots, which were imbedded in the earth and arranged pyramid fashion, with a unique specimen of parrot-tulip at the highest point. No other collector possessed a bulb of the *Tulipa Claesiana*. Balthazar's father had many times refused ten thousand florins for this marvel, which had all the seven colors; the edges of its slender petals gleamed like gold in the sun. The older Claes had taken extraordinary precautions, keeping it in the parlor, lest by any means a single seed should be stolen from him, and had often passed entire days in admiring it. The stem was strong, elastic, erect, and a beautiful green color; the flower cup possessed the perfect form and pure brilliancy of coloring which were once so much sought after in these gorgeous flowers.

"Thirty or forty thousand francs' worth there!" was the notary's comment, as his eyes wandered from the mass of color to Mme. Claes's face; but she was too much delighted

by the sight of the flowers, which glowed like precious stones in the rays of the sunset, to catch the drift of this business-like remark.

"What is the good of it all? You ought to sell them," Pierquin went on, turning to Balthazar.

"Pshaw! what is the money to me!" answered Claes, with the gesture of a man to whom forty thousand francs is a mere trifle.

There was a brief pause, filled by the children's exclamations.

"Do look at this one, mamma!"

"Oh, what a beauty!"

"What is this one called, mamma?"

"What an abyss for the human mind!" exclaimed Balthazar, clasping his hands with a despairing gesture. "One combination of hydrogen and oxygen, in different proportions, but under the same conditions, and all those different colors are produced from the same materials!"

The terms which he used were quite familiar to his wife, but he spoke so rapidly that she did not grasp his meaning; Balthazar bethought him that she had studied his favorite science, and said, making a mysterious sign, "You should understand that, but you would not yet understand all that I meant," and he seemed to relapse into one of his usual musing fits.

"I should think so," said Pierquin, taking the cup of coffee which Marguerite handed him. "Drive Nature out by the door and she comes in at the window," he went on, speaking to Mme. Claes in a low voice. "You will perhaps be so good as to speak to him yourself; the devil himself would not rouse him now from his cogitations. He will keep on like this till to-morrow morning, I suppose."

He said good-by to Claes, who appeared not to hear a syllable, kissed little Jean in his mother's arms, made a profound bow to Mme. Claes, and went. As soon as the great door was shut upon the visitor, Balthazar threw his arm round his wife's waist, and dispelled all her uneasiness over

his feigned revery by whispering in her ear, "I knew exactly how to get rid of him!"

Mme. Claes raised her face to her husband without attempting to hide the happy tears which filled her eyes. Then she let little Jean slip to the ground, and laid her head on Balthazar's shoulder.

"Let us go back to the parlor," she said after a pause.

Balthazar was in the wildest spirits that evening; he invented innumerable games for the children, and joined in them himself so heartily that he did not notice that his wife left the room two or three times. At half-past nine o'clock, when Jean had been put to bed, and Marguerite had helped her sister Félicie to undress, she came downstairs into the parlor and found her mother sitting in the low chair talking with her father, and saw that her hand lay in his. She turned to go without speaking, fearing to disturb her father and mother, but Mme. Claes saw her.

"Here, come here, Marguerite, dear child," she said, drawing the girl toward her, and kissing her affectionately. "Take your book with you to your room," she added, "and mind you go early to bed."

"Good-night, darling child," said Balthazar.

Marguerite gave her father a good-night kiss and vanished. Claes and his wife were left alone for a while. They watched the last twilight tints fade away in the garden, the leaves turned black, the outlines grew dim and shadowy in the summer dusk. When it was almost dark, Balthazar spoke in an unsteady voice. "Let us go upstairs," he said.

Long before the introduction of the English custom of regarding a wife's apartment as a sort of inner sanctuary, a Flamande's room had been impenetrable. This is due to no ostentation of virtue on the part of the good housewives; it springs from a habit of mind acquired in early childhood, a household superstition which looks on a bedroom as a delicious sanctuary, where there should be an atmosphere of gentle thoughts and feelings, where simplicity is combined with all the sweetest and most sacred associations of social life.

Any woman in Mme. Claes's position would have done her best to surround herself with dainty belongings; but Mme. Claes had brought a refined taste to the task, and a knowledge of the subtle influence which externals exert upon our moods. What would have been luxury for a pretty woman was for her a necessity. "It is in one's own power to be a pretty woman," so another Josephine had said; but there had been something artificial in the grace of the wife of the First Consul, who had never lost sight of her maxim for a moment; Mme. Claes had understood its import, and was always simple and natural.

Familiar as the sight of his wife's room was to Balthazar, he was usually so unmindful of the things about him that a thrill of pleasure went through him, as if he saw it now for the first time. The vivid colors of the tulips, carefully arranged in the tall, slender porcelain jars, seemed to be part of the pageant of a woman's triumph, the blaze of the lights proclaimed it as joyously as a flourish of trumpets. The candle-light falling on the gridelin silken stuffs brought their pale tints into harmony with the brilliant surroundings, breaking the surface with dim golden gleams wherever it caught the light, shining on the petals of the flowers till they glowed like heaped-up gems. And these preparations had been made for him! It was all for him!

Josephine could have found no more eloquent way of telling him that he was the source of all her joys and sorrows. There was something deliciously soothing to the soul in this room, something that banished every thought of sadness, till nothing but the consciousness of perfect and serene happiness was left. The soft clinging perfume of the Oriental hangings filled the air without palling on the senses; the very curtains, so carefully drawn, revealed a jealous anxiety to treasure the lowest word uttered there, to shut out everything beyond from the eyes of him whom she had won back.

Mme. Claes drew the tapestry hangings across the door that no sound might reach them from without. Then, as she stood for a moment wrapped in a loose dressing-gown

with deep frills of lace at the throat, her beautiful hair, black and glossy as a raven's wing, making a setting for her face, Josephine glanced with a bright smile at her husband, who was sitting by the hearth. A witty woman, who at times grows beautiful when her soul passes into her face, can express irresistible hopes in her smile.

A woman's greatest charm consists in a constant appeal to a man's generosity, in a graceful admission of helplessness, which stimulates his pride and awakens his noblest feelings. Is there not a magical power in such a confession of weakness? When the rings had slid noiselessly over the curtain-rod, she went toward her husband, laying her hand on a chair as though to find support, or to move more gracefully and dissemble her lameness. It was a mute request for help. Balthazar seemed lost in thought; his eyes rested on the pale olive face against its dusky background with a sense of perfect satisfaction; now he shook off his musings, sprang up, took his wife in his arms, and carried her to the sofa. This was exactly what she had intended.

"You promised," she said, taking his hands, which thrilled at her touch, "to let me into the secret of your researches. You must admit, dear, that I am worthy of the confidence, for I have been brave enough to study a science which the Church condemns, so that I may understand all that you say. But you must not hide anything from me; I am curious. And, first of all, tell me how it chanced that one morning you looked so troubled when I had left you so happy the evening before?"

"You are dressed so coquettisly to talk about chemistry?"

"No, dear, to learn a secret which will let me a little further into your heart; is not that the greatest of all joys for me? All the sweetness of life is comprised, and has its source, in a closer understanding between two souls. And now, when your love is wholly and solely mine, I want to know this tyrannous Idea which drew you away from me for so long. Yes, I am more jealous of a thought than of all the women in the world. Love is vast, but love is not

infinite; and in science there are unfathomable depths; I cannot let you go forth into them alone. I hate everything that can come between us; some day the fame that you are seeking so eagerly will be yours, and I shall be miserable. Fame would give you intense pleasure, would it not? and I alone should be the source of your pleasures, monsieur."

"No, dear angel, it was not a thought that set me on this glorious quest; it was a man."

"A man!" she cried aghast.

"Do you remember the Polish officer, Pepita, who spent a night here in our house in 1809?"

"Do I remember him? I am vexed with myself because I see his face so often—his bald head, the curling ends of his mustache, his sharp worn features, and those eyes of his, like flickering fires lighted in hell, shining out of the coal-black hollows under his brows! There was something appalling in his listless mechanical way of walking! If all the inns had not been full, he certainly should never have spent the night here!"

"Well, that Polish gentleman was a M. Adam de Wierzchownia," answered Balthazar. "That evening, when you left us sitting in the parlor by ourselves, we fell somehow to talking about chemistry. He had been forced to relinquish his studies from poverty, and had become a soldier. If I remember rightly, it was over a glass of *eau sucrée* that we recognized each other as adepts. When I told Mulquinier to bring the sugar in lumps and not in powder, the captain gave a start of surprise.

" 'Have you ever studied chemistry?' he asked.

" 'Yes, with Lavoisier,' I told him.

" 'You are very lucky,' he exclaimed; 'you are rich, you are your own master—'

"He gave one of those groans that reveal a hell of misery hidden and locked away in a man's heart or brain, a sigh of suppressed and helpless rage of which words cannot give any idea, and completed his sentence with a glance that made me shudder. After a pause, he told me that, since

what might be called the Death of Poland, he had taken refuge in Sweden, and there had sought consolation in the study of chemistry, which had always had an irresistible attraction for him.

"'Well,' he added, 'I see that you have recognized, as I have, that if gum arabic, sugar, and starch are reduced to a fine powder, they are almost indistinguishable, and if analyzed, yield the same ultimate result.'

"There was a second pause. He eyed me keenly for a while, then he spoke confidentially and in a low voice. To-day only the recollection of the general sense of those solemn words remains with me; but there was something so earnest in his tones, such fierce energy in his gestures, that every word seemed to vibrate through me, to be eaten into my brain with hammer-strokes. These, in brief, were his reasonings; for me they were like the coal which the seraphim laid on the lips of the prophet Isaiah, for after my studies with Lavoisier I could understand all that they meant.

"'The ultimate identity of these three substances, to all appearance so different,' he went on, 'suggested the idea that all natural productions might be reduced to a single element. The investigations of modern chemistry have proved that this law holds good to a large extent. Chemistry classifies all creation under two distinct headings—Organic Nature and Inorganic Nature. Organic nature comprises every animal or vegetable growth, every organic structure however elementary, or, to speak more accurately, everything which possesses more or less capacity of motion, which is the measure of its sentient powers. Organic nature is therefore the most important part of our world. Now, analysis has reduced all the products of organic nature to four elements, three of which are gases—nitrogen, oxygen, and hydrogen; and the fourth, carbon, is a non-metallic solid.

"'Inorganic nature, on the other hand—with so little diversity among its forms, with no power of movement or of sentience, destitute, perhaps, of the power of growth,

conceded to it on insufficient grounds by Linnæus—inorganic nature numbers fifty-three simple bodies, and all its products are formed by their various combinations. Is it likely that the constituents should be most numerous when the results are so little various? My old master used to hold that there was a single element common to all these fifty-three bodies, and that some unknown force, no longer exerted, brought about the apparent modifications; this unknown force, in his opinion, the human intellect might discover and apply once more. Well, then, imagine that force discovered and once more set in motion, chemistry would be the science of a single element.

"'Organic and inorganic nature are probably alike based upon four elements; but if we should succeed in decomposing nitrogen, for instance, which we may look upon as a negation, their number would be reduced to three. We are on the very verge of the Grand Ternary of the ancients—we, who are wont to scoff, in our ignorance, at the alchemists of the Middle Ages! Modern chemistry has gone no further than this. It is much, and yet it is very little. Much has been accomplished, for chemistry has learned to shrink before no difficulties; little, because what has been accomplished is as nothing compared with what remains to do. 'Tis a fair science, yet she owes much to chance.

"'There is the diamond, for instance, that crystallized drop of pure carbon, the very last substance, one would think, that man could create. The alchemists themselves, the chemists of the Middle Ages, who thought that gold could be resolved into its different elements, and made up again from them, would have shrunk in dismay from the attempt to make the diamond. Yet we have discovered its nature and the law of its crystallization.

"'As for me,' he added, 'I have gone further yet! I have learned, from an experiment I once made, that the mysterious Ternary, which has filled men's imaginations from time immemorial, will never be discovered by any analytical process, for analysis tends in no one special direc-

tion. But, in the first place, I will describe the experiment. You take seeds of cress (selecting a single one from among the many substances of organic nature), and sow them in flowers of sulphur, which is a simple inorganic body. Water the seeds with distilled water, to make certain that no unknown element mingles with the products of germination. Under these conditions the seeds will sprout and grow, drawing all their nourishment from elements ascertained by analysis. From time to time cut the cress and burn it, until you have collected a sufficient quantity of ash for your analysis; and what does it yield? Silica, alumina, calcic phosphate and carbonate, magnesic carbonate, potassic sulphate and carbonate, and ferric oxide; just as if the cress had sprung up in the earth by the waterside. Yet none of these substances are present in the soil in which the cresses grew; sulphur is a simple body, the composition of distilled water is definitely known; none of them exist in the seeds themselves. We can only suppose that there is one element common to the cress and its environment; that the air, the distilled water, the flowers of sulphur, and the various substances detected by an analysis of the calcined cress (that is to say, the potassium, lime, magnesia, alumina, and so forth) are all various forms of one common element, which is free in the atmosphere, and that the sun has been the active agent.

"'There can be no cavil as to this experiment,' he exclaimed, 'and thence I deduce the existence of the Absolute! One Element common to all substances, modified by a unique Force—that is stating the problem of the Absolute in its simplest form, a problem which the human intellect can solve, or so it seems to me.

"'You are confronted at the outset by the mysterious Ternary, before which humanity has knelt in every age—Primitive Matter, the Agency, and the Result. Throughout all human experience you find the awful number Three, in all religions, sciences, and laws. And there,' he said, 'war and poverty put an end to my researches!

"'You are a pupil of Lavoisier's; you are rich, and can spend your life as you will; I will share my guesses at truth with you, the results of the experiments which gave me glimpses of the end to which research should be directed. The PRIMITIVE ELEMENT must be an element common to oxygen, hydrogen, nitrogen, and carbon; the AGENCY must be the common principle of positive and negative electricity. If after inventing and applying test upon test you can establish these two theories beyond a doubt, you will be in possession of the First Cause, the key to all the phenomena of nature.

"'Oh! Monsieur, when you carry *there*,' he said, striking his forehead, 'the last word of creation, a foreshadowing of the Absolute, can you call it living to be dragged hither and thither over the earth, to be one among blind masses of men who hurl themselves upon each other at a given signal without knowing why. My waking life is an inverted dream. My body comes and goes, does this and that, amid men and cannon, goes under fire, and marches across Europe at the bidding of a power which I despise; and I have no consciousness of it all. My inmost soul is rapt in the contemplation of one fixed idea, engrossed by one all-absorbing thought—the Quest of the Absolute; to detect the force that is seen at work when a few seeds, which cannot be told one from another, set under the same conditions, will spring up and blossom, and some flowers will be white and some will be yellow. You can see its mysterious operation in insects, by feeding silkworms, apparently alike in structure, on the same leaves, and some will spin a white, others a yellow cocoon; you can see it in man himself when his own children bear no resemblance to their father or mother. Hence, may we not logically infer that there is one Cause underlying these effects, beneath all the phenomena of nature? Is it not in conformity with all our thoughts of God to imagine that He has brought everything to pass by the simplest means?

"'The followers of Pythagoras of old adored the ONE

whence issued the Many (their expression for the Primitive Element); men have reverenced the number Two, the first aggregation and type of all that follow; and in every age and creed the number THREE has represented God (that is to say, Matter, Force, and Result); through all these confused gropings of the human mind there is a dim perception of the Absolute! Stahl and Becher, Paracelsus and Agrippa, all great seekers of occult causes, had for password *Trismegistus* —that is to say, the Grand Ternary. Ignorant people, who echo and re-echo the old condemnations of alchemy, that transcendental chemistry, have doubtless no suspicion that our discoveries justify the impassioned researches of those forgotten great men!

"'Even when the secret of the Absolute is found, the problem of Movement remains to be grappled with. Ah me! while shot and shell are my daily fare, while I am commanding men to fling away their lives for nothing, my old master is making discovery on discovery, soaring higher and faster toward the Absolute. And I? I shall die, like a dog, in the corner of a battery! . . .'

"As soon as the poor great man had grown somewhat calmer, he said in a brotherly fashion that touched me—'If I should think of any experiment worth making, I will leave it to you before I die.'

"My Pepita," said Balthazar, pressing his wife's hand, "tears of rage and despair coursed down his hollow cheeks as he spoke, and his words kindled a fire in me. Somewhat in this way Lavoisier had reasoned before, but Lavoisier had not the courage of his opinions . . ."

"Indeed!" cried Mme. Claes, interrupting, in spite of herself, "then it was this man who only spent one night under our roof that robbed us all of your affection; one phrase, one single word of his has ruined our children's happiness and our own? Oh! dear Balthazar, did he make the sign of the cross? Did you look at him closely? Only the Tempter could have those yellow eyes, blazing with the fire of Prometheus. Yes. Only the Fiend himself could

have snatched you away from me; ever since that day you have been neither father nor husband nor head of the household—"

"What!" exclaimed Balthazar, springing to his feet and looking searchingly at his wife, "do you blame your husband for rising above other men, that he may spread the divine purple of glory beneath your feet? a poor tribute compared with the treasures of your heart. Why, do you know what I have achieved in these three years? I have made giant strides, my Pepita!" he cried, in his enthusiasm.

It seemed to his wife at that moment that the glow of inspiration lighted up his face as love had never done, and her tears flowed as she listened.

"I have combined chlorine and nitrogen; I have decomposed several substances hitherto believed to be elements; I have discovered new metals. Nay," he said, as he looked at his weeping wife, "I have decomposed tears. Tears are composed of a little phosphate of lime, chloride of sodium, mucus and water."

He went on speaking without seeing that Josephine's face was drawn and distorted with pain; he had mounted the winged steed of science, and was far from the actual world.

"That analysis, dear, is one of the strongest proofs of the theory of the Absolute. All life, of course, implies combustion; the duration of life varies as the fire burns rapidly or slowly. The existence of the mineral is prolonged indefinitely, for in minerals combustion is potential, latent, or imperceptible. In the case of many plants this waste is so constantly repaired through the agency of moisture that their life seems to be practically endless; there are living vegetable growths which have been in existence since the last cataclysm. But when, for some unknown end, nature makes a more delicate and perfect piece of mechanism, endowing it with sentience, instinct, or intelligence (which mark three successive stages of organic development), the combustion of vitality in such organisms varies directly with the amount performed.

"Man, representing the highest point of intelligence, is a piece of mechanism which possesses the faculty of Thought, one-half of creative power. And combustion is accordingly more intense in man than in any other animal organism; its effects may be in a measure traced by the presence of phosphates, sulphates, and carbonates in the system, which are revealed by analysis. What are these substances but traces of the action of electric fluid, the life-giving principle? Should we not look to find the compounds produced by electricity in greater variety in man than in any other animal? Was it not to be expected that man would possess greater faculties for absorbing larger quantities of the Absolute Element, greater powers of assimilating it, an organization more perfectly adapted for converting it to his own uses, for drawing from it his physical force and his mental power? I am sure of it. Man is a matrass. In my opinion the idiot's brain contains less phosphorus, less of all the products of electro-magnetism, which are redundant in the madman; they are present in small quantities in the ordinary brain, and are found in their right proportion in the brain of the man of genius. The porter, the dancer, the universal lover, and the glutton misdirect the force stored up in their systems through the agency of electricity. Indeed, our sentiments—"

"That is enough, Balthazar! You terrify me; these are blasphemies. What! my love for you is—"

"Matter etherealized, and given off," answered Claes, "the secret doubtless of the Absolute. Only think of it! If I should be the first—I the first—if I find it out . . . if I find . . . if I find . . . !"

The words fell from him in three different tones of voice; his face gradually underwent a change; he looked like a man inspired.

"I will make metals, I will make diamonds; all that nature does I will do."

"Will you be any happier?" cried Josephine, in her despair. "Accursed science! Accursed fiend! You are for-

getting, Claes, that this is the sin of pride by which Satan fell. You are encroaching on God!"

"Oh! oh!"

"He denies God!" she cried, wringing her hands. "Claes, God wields a power which will never be yours."

At this slight on his beloved science Claes looked at his wife, and a quiver seemed to pass through him.

"What force?" he said.

"The one sole force—Movement. That is what I have gathered from the books I have read for your sake. You can analyze flowers, or fruit, or Malaga wine, and of course discover their exact chemical composition, and find elements in them which apparently are not to be found in the surroundings, as with that cress you spoke of; possibly by dint of effort you could collect those elements together, but would you make flowers, or fruit, or Malaga wine from them? Could you reproduce the mysterious action of the sun? of the Spanish climate? Decomposition is one thing, creation is another!"

"If I should discover the compelling force, I could create."

"Nothing will stop him!" cried Pepita, with despair in her voice. "Oh! my love, love is slain. I have lost love . . ."

She burst into sobs, and through her tears her eyes seemed more beautiful than ever for the sorrow, and pity, and love that shone in them.

"Yes," she said, sobbing, "you are dead to everything else. I see it all. Science is stronger in you than you yourself; you have soared too far and too high; you can never drop to earth again to be the companion of a poor woman. What happiness could I give you now? Ah! I tried to believe that God had made you to show forth His works and to sing His praises; that this irresistible and tyrannous power had been set in your heart by God's own hand. It was a melancholy consolation. But, no. God is good; He would have left a little room in your heart for

the wife who idolizes you, and the children over whom you should watch. The fiend alone could enable you to walk alone among those bottomless pits; in darkness, lighted not by faith in heaven, but by a hideous belief in your own powers! Otherwise, you would have seen, dear, that you had run through nine hundred thousand francs in three years. Ah! do me justice, my god on earth! I do not murmur at anything you do. If we had only each other, I would pour out both our fortunes at your feet; I would pray you to take it and fling it in your furnace, and laugh to see it vanish in curling smoke. Then, if we were poor I should not be ashamed to beg, so that you might have coal for your furnace fire. Oh! more than that, I would joyfully fling myself into it, if that would help you to find your execrable Absolute, since it seems that all your happiness and hopes are bound up in that unsolved riddle. But there are our children, Claes; what will become of our children if you do not find out this hellish secret very soon? Do you know why Pierquin came this evening? It was to ask for thirty thousand francs, a debt which we cannot pay. Your estates are yours no longer. I told him that you had the thirty thousand francs, to spare the awkwardness of answering the question he was certain to ask; and it has occurred to me that we might raise the money by selling our old-fashioned silver."

She saw the tears about to gather in her husband's eyes, flung herself at his feet, and raised her clasped hands imploringly in despair.

"Dearest," she cried, "if you cannot give up your studies, leave them for a little until we can save money enough for you to resume them again. Oh! I do not condemn them! To please you, I would blow your furnace fires; but do not drag our children down to poverty and want. You cannot love them surely any more; science has eaten away your heart, but you owe it to them to leave their lives unclouded, you must not leave them to a life of wretchedness. I have not loved them enough. I have often wished that I had

borne no children, that so our souls might be knit more closely together, that I might share your inner life! And now, to stifle my remorse, I must plead my children's cause before my own."

Her hair had come unbound, and fell over her shoulders; all the thoughts that crowded up within her seemed to flash like arrows from her eyes. She triumphed over her rival. Balthazar caught her in his arms, laid her on the sofa, and sat at her feet.

"And it is I who have caused your grief?" he said, speaking like a man awakened from a painful dream.

"Poor Claes, if you hurt us, it was in spite of yourself," she said, passing her hand through his hair. "Come, sit here beside me," she added, pointing to a place on the sofa. "There! I have forgotten all about it, now that we have you again. It is nothing, dear, we shall retrieve all our losses; but you will not wander so far from your wife again? Promise me that you will not. My great, handsome Claes. You must let me exercise over that noble heart of yours the woman's influence that artists and great men need to soothe them in failure and disappointment. You must let me cross you sometimes, for your own good. I will never abuse the power, and you may answer sharply and grumble at me. Yes, you shall be famous, but you must be happy too! Do not put chemistry first. Listen! we will not ask too much; we will let science share your heart with us, but you must deal fairly, and our half of your heart must be really ours! Now, tell me, is not my unselfishness sublime?"

She drew a smile from Balthazar. With a woman's wonderful tact, she had changed the solemn tone of their talk, and brought the burning question into the domains of jest, a woman's own domain. But even with the laughter on her lips, something seemed to clutch tightly at her heart, and her pulse scarcely throbbed as evenly and gently as usual; but when she saw revived in Balthazar's eyes the expression which used to thrill her with delight and

exultation, and knew that none of her old power was lost, she smiled again at him, as she said—"Believe me, Balthazar, nature made us to feel; and though you will have it that we are nothing but an electrical mechanism, your gases and etherealized matter will never account for our power of foreseeing the future."

"Yes," he answered, "by means of affinities. The power of vision which makes the poet and the deductive power of the man of science are both based on visible affinities, though they are impalpable and imponderable, so that ordinary minds look on them as 'moral phenomena,' but in reality they are purely physical. Every dreamer of dreams sees and draws deductions from what he sees. Unluckily, such affinities as these are too rare, and the indications are too slight to be submitted to analysis and observation."

"And this," she said, coming closer for a kiss, to put chemistry, which had returned so inopportunely at her question, to flight again, "is this to be an affinity?"

"No, a combination; two substances which have the same *sign* produce no chemical action."

"Hush! hush!" she said, "if you do not wish me to die of sorrow. Yes, dear, to see my rival always before me, even in the ecstasy of love, is more than I can bear."

"But, my dear heart, you are always in every thought of mine; my work is to make our name famous, you are the undercurrent of it all."

"Let us see; look into my eyes!"

Excitement had brought back all the beauty of youth to her face, and her husband saw nothing but her face above a mist of lace and muslin. "Yes, I did very wrong to neglect you for science. And, Pepita, when I fall to musing again, as I shall do, you must rouse me; I wish it."

Her eyes fell, and she let him take her hand, her greatest beauty, a hand that was at once strong and delicately shaped.

"But I am not satisfied yet," she said.

"You are so enchantingly lovely, that you can ask and have anything."

"I want to wreck your laboratory and bind this science of yours in chains," she said, fire flashing from her eyes.

"Well, then, the devil take chemistry!"

"All my grief is blotted out by this moment," she said; "after this inflict any pain on me."

Tears came to Balthazar's eyes at the words.

"You are right," he said; "I only saw you through a veil, as it were, and I no longer heard you, it had come to that—"

"If I had been alone," she said, "I could have borne it in silence; I would not have raised my voice, my sovereign; but there were your sons to think of, Claes. Be sure of this, that if you had dissipated all your fortune, even for a glorious end, your great motives would have weighed for nothing with the world, your children would have suffered for what the world would call your extravagance. It should be sufficient, should it not, for your far-seeing mind, if your wife calls your attention to a danger which you had not noticed? Let us talk no more about it," she added, smiling at him, with a bright light dancing in her eyes. "Let us not be only half happy this evening, Claes."

On the morrow of this crisis in the fortunes of the household, Balthazar Claes never went near his laboratory, and spent the day in his wife's society. Doubtless at Josephine's instance he had promised to relinquish his experiments. On the following day the family went to spend two months in the country, only returning to town to make preparations for the ball that had always been given in former years on the anniversary of their marriage.

Balthazar's affairs had become greatly involved, partly through debts, partly through neglect; every day brought fresh proof of this. His wife never added to his annoyance by reproaches; on the contrary, she did her utmost to meet and smooth over their embarrassments. There had been seven servants in their household on the occasion of their last "At Home," only three of them now remained—Lemulquinier, Josette the cook, and an old waiting-maid,

Martha by name, who had been with her mistress ever since Mlle. Josephine left her convent. With so limited a retinue it was impossible to receive the aristocracy of Douai; but Mme. Claes, who was equal to the emergency, suggested that a chef should be sent for from Paris, that their gardener's son should be pressed into their service, and that they should borrow Pierquin's man. Nothing betrayed the straits that they were in.

During the three weeks of preparation Mme. Claes kept her husband so cleverly employed that he did not miss his old occupations. She commissioned him to choose the flowers and exotic plants for the decoration of the staircase, the rooms, and the gallery; at another time she sent him to Dunkirk to procure some of the huge fish without which a Netherland banquet would be shorn of all its glory. A fête given by the Claes was a very important function, demanding a prodigious amount of forethought and a heavy correspondence; for in the Low Countries, where family traditions of hospitality are sedulously maintained, for masters and servants alike, a successful dinner is a triumph scored at the expense of the guests.

Oysters arrived from Ostend, fruit was sent for from Paris, and grouse from Scotland, no detail was neglected, the Maison Claes was to entertain on the old lavish scale. Moreover, the ball at the Maison Claes was a well-known social event with which the winter season opened in Douai, and Douai at that time was the chief town of the department. For fifteen years, therefore, it had behooved Balthazar to distinguish himself on this occasion; and so well had he acquitted himself as a host that the ball was talked of for twenty leagues round. The toilets, the invitations sent out, and any novelty that appeared even in the smallest details, were discussed all over the department.

This bustle of preparation left Claes little time for meditation on the Quest of the Absolute. His thoughts had been turned into other channels, old domestic instincts revived the dormant pride of the Fleming, the householder awoke, and

the man of science flung himself heart and soul into the task of astonishing the town. He determined that some new refinement of art should give this evening a character of its own; and of all the whims of extravagance he chose the fairest, the costliest, and most fleeting, filling his house with scented thickets of rare plants, and preparing bouquets for the ladies. Everything was in keeping with this unprecedented luxury; it seemed as if nothing that could insure success were lacking.

But the 29th Bulletin, bearing the particulars of the rout of the Grand Army and of the terrible passage of the Beresina, reached Douai that afternoon. The news made a deep and gloomy impression on the Douaisiens, and out of patriotism every one declined to dance.

Among the letters that reached Douai from Poland there was one for Balthazar. It was from M. de Wierzchownia, who was at that moment in Dresden, dying of the wounds received in a recent engagement. Several ideas had occurred to him, he said, since they had spoken together of the Quest of the Absolute, and these ideas he desired to leave as a legacy to his host of three years ago. After reading the letter Claes fell into deep musings, which did honor to his patriotism; but his wife knew better, she saw that a second and deeper shadow had fallen over her festival. The glory of the Maison Claes seemed dimmed, as it were, by its approaching eclipse; there was a feeling of gloom in the atmosphere in spite of the magnificence, in spite of the display of all the treasures of bric-à-brac collected by six generations of amateurs, and now beheld for the last time by the admiring eyes of the Douaisiens.

The queen of the evening was Marguerite, who made her first appearance in society. All eyes were turned on her, partly because of her fresh simplicity and the innocent frankness of her expression, partly because the young girl seemed almost like a part of the old house. With the soft rounded contour of her face, the chestnut hair parted in the middle, and smoothed down on either side of her brow, clear hazel

eyes, pretty rounded arms and plump yet slender form, she might have stepped out of the canvas of one of the old Flemish pictures on the wall. You could read indications of a firm will in the broad high forehead, gentle, shy, and sedate as she seemed; and though there was nothing sad or languid about her, there was but little girlish gleefulness in her face. Thoughtfulness there was, and thrift, and a sense of duty, all Flemish characteristics; and on a second glance, there was a certain charm and softness of outline and a meek pride which atoned for a lack of animation, and gave promise of domestic happiness. By some freak of nature, which physiologists as yet cannot explain, she bore no likeness to either father or mother, but she was the living image of her maternal great-grandmother, a Conyncks of Bruges, whose portrait had been religiously preserved, and bore witness to the resemblance.

Supper gave some life to the ball. If the disasters that had befallen the Grand Army forbade the relaxation of dancing, no one apparently felt that the prohibition need apply to the pleasures of the table. Good patriots, however, left early, and only a few indifferent spirits remained, with some few card-players, and the intimate friends of the family. Little by little silence fell on the brilliantly lighted house, to which all Douai had been wont to flock, and by one o'clock in the morning the gallery was empty, the candles were extinguished in one salon after another, and the courtyard itself, so lately full of noises and lights, had settled down into its wonted darkness and gloom. It was like a foreshadowing of the future.

As soon as the Claes returned to their rooms, Balthazar gave his wife the Polish officer's letter to read; she gave it back to him mournfully, she foresaw the end.

From that day forth the tedium of his life began visibly to weigh on Balthazar's spirits. In the morning, after breakfast, he used to play with little Jean for a while in the parlor, and talked with the two girls, who were busy with their sewing, or embroidery, or lace-work; but he soon wearied of the

play and of the talk, and everything seemed to be a set task. When his wife came down, having changed her wrapper for a morning dress, he was still sitting in the low chair, gazing blankly at Marguerite and Félicie; the rattle of their bobbins apparently did not disturb him. When the newspaper came, he read it deliberately through, like a retired tradesman at a loss how to kill time. Then he would rise to his feet, look at the sky for a while through the window panes, listlessly mend the fire, and sit down again in his chair, as if the tyrannous ideas within him had deprived him of all consciousness of his movements.

Mme. Claes keenly regretted her defective education and lack of memory. It was difficult for her to sustain an interesting conversation; perhaps it is always difficult for two persons who have said everything to each other to find anything new to talk of unless they look for it among indifferent topics. The life of the heart has its moments, and wants contrasts; the practical questions of daily life are soon disposed of by energetic minds accustomed to make prompt decisions, and social frivolity is unendurable to two souls who love. Such souls, thus isolated, who know each other thoroughly, should seek their enjoyments in the highest regions of thought, for it is impossible to set something little against something that is vast. Moreover, when a man has dwelt for long on great subjects, he is not easy to amuse, unless there is something of the child in his nature, the power of flinging himself into the present moment, the simple fresh-heartedness that makes men of great genius such charming children; but is not this youthfulness of heart rare indeed among those who have set themselves to see and know and understand all things?

During those months Mme. Claes tried all the expedients which love or necessity could suggest; she even learned to play backgammon, a game that had always presented insuperable difficulties to her mind; she tried to interest Balthazar in the girls' education, consulting him about their studies, planning courses of lessons; but all these resources

came to an end at last, and Josephine and Balthazar were in something the same position as Mme. de Maintenon and Louis XIV. But Mme. de Maintenon could bring the pomps of power to her aid; she had wily courtiers who lent themselves to her comedies, playing their parts as ambassadors from Siam, and envoys from the Grand Sophi, to divert a weary king; and Louis XIV., after draining the wealth of France, had known what it was to be reduced to a younger brother s shifts for raising money; he had outlived youth and success, and had come to know old age and failure, and, in spite of his grandeur, to a piteous sense of his own helplessness; and she, the royal *bonne*, who had soothed his children, was not always able to soothe their father, who had squandered wealth and power and human lives, who had given his life for vanity and set God at naught, and was now paying the penalty of it all. But Claes was not suffering from exhaustion, but from unemployed energy.

One overwhelming thought possessed him. He was dreaming of the glories of science, of adding to the knowledge of the world, of fame that might have been his. He was suffering as a struggling artist suffers, like Samson bound to the pillars of the temple of the Philistines. So the result was much the same for the two sovereigns, though the intellectual monarch was suffering through his strength, and the other through his weakness.

What could Pepita do, unaided, for this kind of scientific nostalgia? At first she tried every means that family life afforded her, then she called society to the rescue, and gave two "cafés" every week. Cafés had recently superseded "teas" in Douai. At these social functions, the invited guests sipped the delicious wines and liqueurs with which the cellars always overflow in that favored land, drank their *café noir* or *café au lait frappé*, and partook of various Flemish delicacies; while the women sang ballads, discussed each other's toilets, and retailed all the gossip of the town. It is just as it was in the time of Mieris or Terburg, always the same pictures, but some of the details are altered; the droop-

ing scarlet feathers and gray high-crowned hats are wanting, and you miss the guitars and the picturesque costumes of the sixteenth century.

Balthazar made strenuous efforts to act his part as master of the house, but his constrained courtesy and forced animation left him in a state of languor, which showed but too plainly what inroads the malady had made, and these dissipations were powerless to alleviate the symptoms. Balthazar, on the brink of the precipice, might catch at branch after branch, but the fall, though delayed, was so much the heavier. He never spoke of his old occupations, he never uttered regrets, knowing that it was quite impossible to continue his work, but his voice and movements were languid, his vitality seemed to be at a low ebb. This depression could be seen even in the listless way in which he would take up the tongs, and build fantastic pyramids with the glowing coals.

It was a visible relief when the evening was over; sleep perhaps delivered him for a while from the importunities of thought; but with the morning came the thought that another day must be lived through, and he counted the hours of consciousness as an exhausted traveller might reckon out the leagues of desert that lie between him and his journey's end.

If Mme. Claes knew the causes of this weariness, she tried to shut her eyes to its effects; she would not see the havoc that it wrought. But though she might steel herself against the sight of his mental distress, his kindness of heart left her helpless. When Balthazar listened to Jean's laughter or the girls' chatter, and seemed all the while to hear an inner thought more plainly than his children's voices, Mme. Claes did not dare to ask him what that thought was; but when she saw him shake off his sadness, and try to seem cheerful, that he might not cast a gloom over others, his generosity made her falter in her purpose. His romps with little Jean and playful talk with the two little girls brought a flood of tears to poor Josephine's eyes, and she had to

hurry from the room to hide her feelings; her heroism was costing her dear, it was breaking her heart. There were times when Mme. Claes longed to say, "Kill me, and do as you like!"

Little by little the fire seemed to die out of Balthazar's eyes, and the dull bluish hues of age crept over them. Everything seemed to be done with an effort; there was a dull hopelessness in the tones of his voice and in his manner even toward his wife. Toward the end of April things had grown so much worse that Mme. Claes took alarm. She had blamed herself bitterly and incessantly for having exacted this promise, while she admired the Flemish faith and loyalty with which it was kept. One day when Balthazar looked more depressed than ever she hesitated no longer; she would sacrifice everything if so he might live

"I give you back your word, dear," she said.

Balthazar looked at her in amazement.

"You are thinking of your experiments, are you not?" she went on.

He answered with a terrible readiness, by a gesture, but Mme. Claes had no thought of reproach; she had had time to sound the depths of the abyss into which they were both about to plunge together. She took his hand in hers and pressed it as she smiled at him.

"Thank you, dearest," she said, "I am sure of my power; you have given up what was dearer than life for my sake. Now it is my turn to give up. I have sold a good many of my diamonds, but there are some left, and with those that my brother gave me we could raise money enough for you to continue your experiments. I thought I would keep the jewels for our two girls, but your fame will more than make up for the sparkling stones, and besides, you will give them finer diamonds some day."

The sudden flash of joy over her husband's face was like a death-knell to Josephine's last hopes, and she saw with anguish that his passion was stronger than himself. Claes had a belief which enabled him to walk without faltering

in a path which in his wife's eyes led by the brink of a precipice. He had this faith to sustain him, but to her who had no faith fell the heavier share of the burden; does not a woman always suffer for two? At this moment she chose to believe in his success, seeking thus to excuse herself for her share in the certain wreck of their fortunes.

"The love of my whole life would never repay your devotion, Pepita," said Claes, deeply moved.

He had scarcely spoken the words before Marguerite and Félicie came into the room to wish their father and mother good-morning. Mme. Claes looked down; for a moment she felt almost guilty before the two children; she felt that she had sacrificed their future to a wild delusion; but her husband took them on his knees and talked and laughed with them, because the joy he felt craved expression. Thenceforth Mme. Claes shared in her husband's life of enthusiasm. Science itself and desire of fame were everything to Claes; she not only sympathized with his aims, but all her hopes of her children's future were now bound up in his pursuits. Yet when her director the Abbé de Solis had sold her diamonds for her in Paris, when packages began to arrive from the firm of manufacturing chemists, all the unhappy wife's peace of mind deserted her. It was as if the restless malevolent spirit that possessed her husband tormented her also, and she lived in constant and disquieting expectation. It was she who now sometimes sat like one dead all day long in her low chair, unable to act or to think from the very vehemence of her wishes. Balthazar was at work the while in his laboratory, but she had no outlet for her energies; the pent-up forces of her nature harassed her soul as doubts and fears. Sometimes she blamed herself for weakly humoring a passion which she felt convinced was hopeless; she would remember M. de Solis's censure, and rise from her chair and walk to the window, and look up at the laboratory chimney with dismay and dread. If a curl of smoke went up from it, she would watch it rise in despair, and conflicting ideas strove within her until her

brain reeled. Her children's future was vanishing in that smoke, but she was saving their father's life. Was it not her first duty to make him happy? This last thought would bring peace for a little space.

She had the freedom of the laboratory now, and might stay there as long as she pleased, but even this melancholy satisfaction had to be given up. It was too painful to see Balthazar so absorbed in his work that he did not even notice her presence; sometimes, too, she felt that she was actually in the way; the pangs of jealousy became intolerable, every little unintentional neglect was a deadly wound, a wild desire would seize her that the house might be blown up, and so put an end to it all. She made a barometer, therefore, of old Lemulquinier. When she heard him whistle as he came and went, or laid the table for breakfast and dinner, she augured that her husband's experiments had turned out well; that there was some hope of success in the near future; but if Lemulquinier was sad or sulky, she turned sad, wistful eyes on him: was Balthazar also depressed? A sort of tacit understanding was established between them at last, in spite of the proud reserve of the mistress and the surly independence of the manservant.

She had no resource in herself, no power of throwing off the thoughts that depressed her; she experienced to the full every crisis of hope or despair; the load of anxiety for the husband and the children that she loved weighed more and more heavily on the trembling wife and mother. She scarcely noticed how dreary the house was, or the silence and gloom that once had chilled her heart as she sat in the parlor all day long; she had grown silent too, and forgot to smile. She brought up her two daughters to be good housewives; with a mother's sad foresight, she tried to teach them various branches of womanly skill against the day when they might come face to face with poverty. But beneath the monotonous surface of existence the pulses of life beat painfully. By the end of the summer Balthazar had not only spent all the money which the old Abbé de Solis had raised

by selling the diamonds in Paris, but he was in debt—he owed some twenty thousand francs to Protez and Chiffreville.

In August, 1813, about a year after the day of the opening scene of this story, Claes was no nearer the end in view, though he had made several interesting discoveries, for which, unluckily, he cared not at all. The day which saw his programme completely carried out found him overwhelmed with a sense of failure. The thought of the vast sums of money which had been spent, and all to no purpose, drove him to despair. It was a wretched ending to his hopes. He left his garret, came slowly down into the parlor where the children were, sank into one of the low chairs, and sat there for a while like one dead, paying no heed to the questions with which his wife plied him. He escaped upstairs that he might have no witness to his grief. Josephine followed him, and brought him into her room; and there, alone with her, Balthazar gave way to his despair. In the man's tears, in the broken words that bore witness to the artist's discouragement, in the remorse of the father, there was something so wild and incoherent, so dreadful, so touching, that Mme. Claes, watching him, felt an anguish that she had never known before. The victim comforted the executioner.

When Balthazar said with horrible earnestness, "I am a scoundrel; I am risking our children's lives and yours, I ought to kill myself, it would be a good thing for you all," the words cut her to the heart. She knew her husband so well that she was in terror lest he should act at once on this horrible suggestion; and one of those revulsions of feeling that stir life to its depths swept over her, a revulsion all the more dangerous because Pepita allowed no sign of agitation to appear, and tried to be calm and dispassionate.

"This time I have not consulted Pierquin, dear," she said; "he may be friendly, but he would not be above feeling a secret satisfaction if we were ruined, so I have taken the advice of an old man who has a father's kindness for us. My confessor, the Abbé de Solis, suggested a way of averting ruin at any rate. He came to see your pictures; and he

thinks that if we sell those in the gallery we could pay off all the mortgages as well as your debts to Protez and Chiffreville, for I expect there is something owing to them?"

Claes bent his head as a sign of assent; already his hair was grown white.

"M. de Solis knows the Happes and the Dunckers of Amsterdam," she went on; "they have a mania for buying pictures, their money was only made yesterday; and as they know that such works of art are only to be found in old family collections, they will be only too glad to give their full value for the paintings. Even when our estates are clear, there will still be something left over, for the pictures will bring in at least a hundred thousand ducats, and then you can go on with your work. We need very little, the two girls and I; we will be very careful; and in time we will save enough money to fill the empty frames again with other pictures, and in the meantime you shall be happy."

Balthazar raised his face to his wife's; he felt half doubtful, half relieved. They had exchanged roles. The wife had become the protecting power; and he, in spite of the sympathy of hearts between them, held Josephine in his arms, and did not feel that she was convulsed with anguish, did not see how the tresses of her hair were shaken by the throbbing of her heart, nor notice the nervous quivering of her lips.

"I have not dared to tell you," he cried, "that I am scarcely separated from the Absolute by a hair-breadth. I have only to discover a means of submitting metals to intense heat in a vessel where the pressure of the atmosphere is nil—in short, in a perfect vacuum, and I shall volatilize them."

Mme. Claes almost broke down, the egoistic answer was too much for her. She had expected passionate gratitude for her devotion, and she received—a problem in chemistry. She left her husband abruptly, went downstairs into the parlor, sank into her low chair again, and burst into tears. Her two daughters, Marguerite and Félicie, each took one of her

hands in theirs, and knelt on either side of her, wondering at her grief.

"What is it, mother?" they asked her again and again.

"Poor children! I am dying, I feel that I have not long to live."

Marguerite shuddered as she looked at her mother's face, and for the first time noticed a ghastly pallor beneath the dark olive hue of the skin.

"Martha! Martha!" called Félicie. "Come here, mamma wants you."

The old waiting-woman came running from the kitchen. When she saw the livid color that had replaced the dusky brown-red tints in her mistress's face—"Body of Christ!" she cried in Spanish, "madame is dying!"

She hurried away to bid Josette heat some water for a foot-bath for her mistress, and then returned.

"Don't frighten the master, Martha; say nothing about it," said Mme. Claes. "Poor dear girls!" she added convulsively, clasping Marguerite and Félicie to her heart. "If I could only live long enough to see you both happy and married.—Martha," she went on, "tell Lemulquinier to go to M. de Solis and ask him to come to see me."

The thunderbolt that struck down the mistress of the house naturally brought dismay in the kitchen Josette and Martha, old and devoted servants, were so deeply attached to Mme. Claes and her two daughters that the blow was as heavy as it was unexpected. The terrible words: "Madame is dying, monsieur must have killed her! Be quick and get ready a mustard bath!" had drawn sundry ejaculations from Josette, who hurled them at Lemulquinier. Lemulquinier, calm and phlegmatic as ever, was eating his breakfast at a corner of the table, underneath one of the windows which looked out on the yard. The whole kitchen was as spick and span as the daintiest boudoir.

"I knew how it would end," remarked Josette, looking straight at the valet as she spoke. She had climbed on to a stool to reach down a copper kettle which shone like bur-

nished gold. "What mother could look on and see her children's father amusing himself by frittering away a fortune, like the master does, and everything flying away in smoke."

Josette's countenance, framed in its frilled cap, was not unlike the round wooden nut-crackers that Germans carve; she gave Lemulquinier a sharp glance out of her little blood-shot eyes, which was almost venomous. For all answer the old valet gave a shrug worthy of a sorely-tried Mirabeau, and opened his cavernous mouth, but only to put a piece of bread and butter, accompanied by a morsel of red herring, into it.

"If madame would let monsieur have some money," he said at length, "instead of bothering him, we should all be swimming in gold very soon! There is not the thickness of a farthing between us and the—"

"Well, then, you, with your twenty thousand francs of savings, why don't you hand them over to the master? He is your master, and since you put such faith in his sayings and doings—"

"You know nothing about them, Josette. Just mind your pots and pans, and boil the water," said the Fleming, interrupting the cook.

"I know what I know; I know that we once had several thousand ounces of silver plate here, and you have melted it down, you and your master between you; and we shall very soon have only six halfpennies left out of fivepence."

"And the master," put in Martha, "will kill madame, and get rid of a wife who holds him back, and will not let him eat everything up. He is possessed, that is quite plain. You are risking your soul at the least, Lemulquinier, if you have one, that is, for you are just like a block of ice, when all the rest of us are in such trouble. The young ladies are crying like Magdalens. Be quick and go for M. de Solis!"

"I have the master's orders to set the laboratory straight," said the valet. "It is too far from here to the Quartier d'Esquerchin. Go yourself."

"Just listen to the brute!" said Martha. "Who is to

give madame her foot-bath? Is she to be left to die, with the blood gone to her head?"

"Mulquinier!" said Marguerite from the dining-room, which was next to the kitchen, "when you have left the message for M. de Solis, go and ask Dr. Pierquin to come at once."

"Hein! you will have to go!" said Josette.

"Mademoiselle, monsieur told me to clear out the laboratory," answered Lemulquinier, turning triumphantly to the two women-servants.

M. Claes came down the stairs at this moment, and Marguerite spoke to him. "Father, can you spare us Mulquinier to go on an errand into the town?"

"There, you miserable old heathen, you will have to go now!" said Martha, as she heard M. Claes answer in the affirmative.

The lack of goodwill and devotion to the family on the valet's part was a sore point; the two women and Lemulquinier were always bickering, and his indifference increased their loyal affection. This apparently paltry quarrel was to bring about great results in future days when the family stood in need of help in misfortune.

Once more Balthazar became so absorbed that he did not notice how ill his wife was. He gave little Jean a ride on his knee, but his thoughts were all the while with the problem which he might hope once more to solve. He saw the water brought for his wife's foot-bath, for she had not strength to leave the parlor, or the low chair into which she had sunk. He watched the two girls as they busied themselves about their mother, and did not try to account for their anxiety and care of her. Mme. Claes laid her fingers on her lips if Marguerite or Jean seemed about to speak. A scene of this nature was certain to make a young girl think; and Marguerite, standing between her father and mother, was old enough and sensible enough to understand what it meant.

A time always comes in the history of every family when

the children begin consciously or unconsciously to judge their parents. Mme. Claes felt that this critical time had come; that the girl of sixteen, with her strong sense of justice, would see what would appear to her to be her father's faults very plainly, and Mme. Claes set herself to justify his conduct. The profound respect which she showed for him at this moment, the way in which she effaced herself for fear of disturbing his meditations, left a deep impression on her children's minds; they looked on their father with something like awe. But in spite of the infectious nature of this devotion, Marguerite could not help recognizing it, and her admiration increased for the mother to whom she was bound so closely by every incident of daily life. The young girl's affection had deepened ever since she had dimly divined her mother's troubles and had pondered over them; no human power could have kept the knowledge of them from Marguerite; a word heedlessly let fall by Josette or Martha had enlightened her as to their cause. In spite of Mme. Claes's reserve, her daughter had unravelled thread by thread the mystery of this household tragedy.

In time to come Marguerite would be her mother's active helper and confidante, and, perhaps, in the end a formidable judge. Mme. Claes watched Marguerite anxiously, and tried to fill her heart with her own devotion; she saw the young girl's firmness and sound judgment, and shuddered to think of possible strife between father and daughter when she should be no more, and Marguerite had taken her place. Poor woman! she dreaded the consequences of her death far more than death itself. The resolution she had just taken had been prompted by forethought for Balthazar. By freeing her husband's estate from all liabilities, she left it independent, and forestalled all future disputes by separating his interests from those of her children; she hoped to see him happy until her eyes were closed, and when that day came, Marguerite would be the guardian angel who watched over the family. She hoped to leave her tenderness in Mar-

guerite's heart, and so, from beyond the grave, her love should still shine upon those so dear to her. Yet she shrank from lowering Claes in Marguerite's eyes, and would not impart her misgivings and fears until the inevitable moment came; she watched Marguerite more closely than ever, wondering whether of her own accord the young girl would be a mother to her brothers and sister, and a gentle and tender helpmeet to her father.

So Mme. Claes's last days were imbittered by fears and sad forebodings of which she could speak to no one. She felt that her death-blow had been dealt her in that last fatal scene, and her thoughts turned to the future; while Balthazar, now totally unfitted for the cares of property and the interests of domestic life, thought of nothing but the Absolute. The deep silence in the parlor was only broken by the monotonous beating of Balthazar's foot; he did not notice that little Jean had wearied of his ride, and climbed down from his father's knee. Marguerite, sitting beside her mother, looked at her white, sorrowful face, and then glanced from time to time at her father, and wondered why he showed no feeling. Presently the street door shut to with a clang that echoed through the house, and the family saw the old Abbé de Solis slowly crossing the court on his nephew's arm.

"Oh! here is M. Emmanuel," cried Félicie.

"Good boy!" murmured Mme. Claes, as she saw Emmanuel de Solis; "I am glad to see him again."

Marguerite's face flushed at her mother's praise. Only two days ago the sight of the Abbé's nephew had stirred mysterious feelings in her heart, and awakened thoughts that had hitherto lain dormant. Only two days ago her mother's confessor had come to see the pictures in the gallery, and one of those small events that pass unheeded, and alter the whole course of a life, had then taken place; for this reason a brief sketch of the two visitors must be given here.

Mme. Claes made it a rule of conduct to perform the

duties of her religion in private. Her director, who now entered the house for the second time, was scarcely known by sight to its inmates; but it was impossible to see the uncle and nephew together without feeling touched and reverent, and their visit had left the same impression on every one.

The Abbé de Solis was an old man of eighty, with silver hair; all the ebbing life in the feeble, wasted face seemed to linger in the eyes. He walked with difficulty, for one of his shrunken legs terminated in a painfully deformed foot incased in a velvet wrapping, so that he always needed the support of a crutch or of his nephew's arm. Yet when you saw the bent figure and emaciated frame, you felt that an iron will sustained that fragile and suffering body, and that a pure and religious soul dwelt within it. The Spanish priest, distinguished for his vast learning, his knowledge of the world, and his sincere piety, had been successively a Dominican friar, cardinal-penitentiary of Toledo, and vicar-general of the archbishopric of Mechlin. The influence of the house of Casa-Real would have made him one of the highest dignitaries of the Church; but even if the French Revolution had not put an end to his ecclesiastical career, grief for the death of the young Duke, whose governor he had been, had led him to retire from active life, and to devote himself entirely to the education of a nephew, who had been left an orphan at a very early age.

After the French conquest of the Netherlands he had settled in Douai to be near Mme. Claes. In his youth he had felt an enthusiastic reverence for Saint Theresa, and had always decided leanings toward the more mystical side of Christianity. There have always been Illuminists and Quietists in Flanders; Mlle. Bourignon made most of her converts among the Flemings; and the old Abbé de Solis found a little flock of Catholics in Douai, who still clung, undeterred by papal censure, to the doctrines of Fénelon and Mme. Guyon, and was the more glad to stay among them because they looked on him as a father in the faith.

His morals were austere, his life had been exemplary; it was said that he had the gift of trance, and had seen visions. But the stern ascetic was not utterly divorced from the things of this life; his affection for his nephew was a link that bound him to the world, and he was thrifty for Emmanuel's sake. He laid his flock under contribution for a work of charity before having recourse to his own purse; and he was so widely known and respected for his disinterestedness, his perspicacity was so seldom at fault, that every one was ready to answer his appeals. To give some idea of the contrast between uncle and nephew, the older man might be compared to a hollow willow by the waterside, and the younger to a briar-rose climbing about the old lichen-covered tree, and covering it with graceful garlands, which seem to support it.

Emmanuel had been rigidly brought up. His uncle hardly allowed him to go out of his sight; no damsel was ever more jealously guarded by her mother; and Emmanuel was almost morbidly conscientious and innocently romantic. Souls that draw all their force from religion retain the bloom of youth that is rubbed off so soon, and the old priest had checked the development of pleasure-loving instincts in his pupil; constant study and an almost monastic discipline had been his preparation for the battle of life. Such a bringing up, which launched Emmanuel into the world with all his youthful freshness of heart, might make his happiness if his affections were rightly placed at the outset, and had endowed him with an angelic purity which invested him with something of the charm of a young girl. The gentle eyes veiled a brave and fearless soul; there was a light in them that thrilled other souls, as the sound given out by crystal vibrates on the ear. His face was eloquent, yet his features were regular; no one could fail to be struck by their flawless delicacy of outline, and by the expression of repose which comes from inward peace. His fair complexion seemed still more brilliant by force of contrast with his dark eyes and hair. Everything about him was in har-

mony; his voice did not disappoint the expectations raised by so beautiful a face, and his almost feminine grace of movement and clear, soft gaze were in keeping with his voice. He did not seem to be aware that his half-melancholy reserve, his self-repression, his respectful and tender solicitude for his uncle, excited interest in him; but no one who had seen the two together—the younger man carefully adapting himself to the old Abbé's tottering gait, heedfully looking ahead for the smoothest path, and avoiding any obstacle over which the elder might stumble, could fail to recognize in Emmanuel those generous qualities of heart and brain that make man so noble a creature.

Emmanuel's real greatness showed itself in his love for his uncle, who could do no wrong in his eyes, to whom he rendered an unquestioning obedience; some prophetic instinct, surely, had suggested the gracious name given to him at the font. If in private or abroad the old Abbé exerted the stern and arbitrary authority of a Dominican father, Emmanuel would sometimes raise his head in such noble protest—with a gesture which seemed to say if another man had ventured to oppose him, he would have shown his spirit—that gentle natures were touched by it, as painters are moved by the sight of a great work of art; for a beautiful thought has the same power to stir our souls, whether it is revealed in a living human form, or made real for us by the power of art.

Emmanuel had come with his uncle to see the pictures in the Maison Claes; and Marguerite, having learned from Martha that the Abbé de Solis was in the picture-gallery, found some light pretext for speaking to her mother, so that she might see the great man of whom she had heard so much. She had gone thither unthinkingly, hiding her little stratagem under the careless manner by which young girls so effectually conceal their real thoughts, and by the side of the old man dressed in black, with his deathly pallor and bent and stooping frame, she had seen Emmanuel's young and beautiful face. The two young creatures had gazed at each other with the same childlike wonder in their eyes;

Emmanuel and Marguerite must surely have met each other before in their dreams. Their eyes fell at once, and met again with the same unconscious avowal.

Marguerite took her mother's arm and spoke to her in a low voice to keep up the pretence of her errand; and from under shelter of her mother's wing, as it were, she turned, with a swan-like movement of her throat, to glance once more at Emmanuel, who still stood with his uncle on his arm.

The windows of the gallery had been distributed so that all the light should fall on the pictures, and the dimness of the shadows favored the stolen glances which are the delight of timid souls. Neither of them had, of course, advanced even in thought as far as the *if* with which passion begins; but both of them felt that their hearts were stirred with a vague trouble which youth keeps to itself, shrinking perhaps from disclosing the secret, or wishing to linger over its sweetness. The first impression which calls forth the long dormant emotion of youth is nearly always followed by a mute wonder such as children feel when, for the first time, they hear music. Some children laugh at first, and then grow thoughtful; others listen gravely for a while, and then begin to laugh; but there are souls who are destined to live for poetry or love, and they listen long, with a mute request to hear the music again; their eyes are lighted up with pleasure, or with a dawning sense of wonder at the Infinite. If we are always bound with all the force of early association to the spot where we first understood the beauty and mystery of sound; if we remember the musician and even the instrument with delight, how can we help loving the other soul that for the first time reveals the music of life to us? Does not the heart from which we draw our first breath of love become, as it were, our native country? Emmanuel and Marguerite were each for each that musical voice which awakens a sleeping sense; it was as if a hand had withdrawn the veil of cloud and pointed out to them the distant shore bathed in a noonday blaze of light.

When Mme. Claes made the Abbé pause for a moment

before a picture of an angel by Guido, Marguerite leaned forward a little to see what Emmanuel thought of it, and Emmanuel glanced at Marguerite, comparing the mute thought shadowed forth on the painter's canvas with the thought revealed in the girl who stood there in life before him. She felt and understood the unconscious and delicious flattery. The old Abbé gravely praised the beautiful composition, and Mme. Claes replied; the young people were silent.

The mysterious dusk of the gallery, the quiet that brooded over the house, the presence of their elders, all the circumstances of their meeting, served to stamp it on the memory, and to deepen the vague outlines of a shadowy dream. All the confused thoughts that fell like rain in Marguerite's soul seemed to have spread themselves out like a wide, clear sea, which was lighted up by a ray of light when Emmanuel stammered out a few words as he took leave of Mme. Claes. The young, rich voice exerted a mysterious spell over her heart; the revelation was complete; it only rested with Emmanuel whether it should bear fruit for him; for the man who first awakens love in a girl's heart is often an unconscious instrument of fate, and leaves his work unfinished. Marguerite bowed in confusion; her good-by was a glance that seemed to express her regret at losing this pure and charming vision. Like the child, she wanted to hear her music once again.

The leave-taking took place at the foot of the old staircase, before the parlor door, and from the parlor window she watched the uncle and nephew cross the court, and followed them with her eyes until the street door closed on them. Mme. Claes had been so deeply engrossed with the weighty matters which her director had come to discuss that she had not thought of watching her daughter's face; and on the occasion of this second visit she was again full of such terrible trouble that she did not see in the red flush on Marguerite's face the indications of happiness and the workings of a girlish heart.

By the time the old Abbé was announced Marguerite had taken up her work again, and apparently found it so interesting that she greeted the uncle and nephew without raising her eyes from it. M. Claes returned the Abbé de Solis's bow mechanically, and left the parlor as if his presence were demanded elsewhere. The venerable Dominican seated himself beside Mme. Claes with one of those keen glances by which he seemed to read the depths of souls: he had scarcely seen M. Claes and his wife before he guessed that some catastrophe had taken place.

"Go into the garden, children," said the mother. "Marguerite, take Emmanuel to see your father's tulips."

Marguerite, somewhat embarrassed, took Félicie's hand in hers and looked toward the visitor, who reddened and followed her out of the parlor, catching up little Jean to keep himself in countenance. When all four of them were out in the garden, Jean and Félicie scampered off, and Marguerite, left alone with young M. de Solis, went toward the bed of tulips, which Lemulquinier always planted out in the same way, year after year.

"Are you fond of tulips?" Marguerite asked, as Emmanuel seemed unwilling to break the silence.

"They are magnificent, mademoiselle; but a love of tulips is an acquired taste. The flowers dazzle me; I expect that it is because I am so used to working in my dark little room beside my uncle; I like softer colors better."

He looked at Marguerite as he uttered these last words; but in that glance, full of confused longings, there was no suggestion that the quiet face before him, with its white velvet surface and soft color, was like a flower.

"Do you work very hard?" Marguerite asked Emmanuel as they went toward a green-painted garden seat. "You will not be so close to the tulips here," she added; "they will not be so tiring to your eyes. You are right, the colors are dazzling; they make one's eyes ache."

"Yes, I work hard," the young man answered after a short pause, spent in smoothing the gravel on the path with

his foot. "I work at all sorts of things. . . . My uncle meant to make a priest of me—"

"Oh!" Marguerite exclaimed naively.

"I objected; I felt that I had no vocation. But it took a great deal of courage to cross my uncle's wishes. He is so kind and so very fond of me. Quite lately he paid for a substitute to save me from the conscription, and I am only a poor orphan nephew—"

"Then what do you mean to do?" asked Marguerite, with a sudden gesture, which seemed as if she would fain take the words back again, for she added—"Pardon me, monsieur; you must think me very inquisitive."

"Oh! mademoiselle, nobody but my uncle has ever asked me the question," said Emmanuel, looking at her admiringly and gratefully. "I am to be a schoolmaster. There is no help for it; I am not rich, you see. If I can obtain a headmastership in some school in Flanders, I shall have enough to live upon. I shall marry some woman who will be content with very little, and whom I shall love. That is the sort of life that is in prospect for me. Perhaps that is why I would rather have a moon-daisy from the fields about Orchies, a flower that no one looks at, than these glowing tulips, all purple and golden and emerald and sapphire. The tulips seem to me a sort of symbol of a brilliant and luxurious life, just as the moon-daisy is like a quiet, old-fashioned life, a poor schoolmaster's life such as mine will be."

"Until now, I have always called the moon-daisies marguerites," said she.

Emmanuel de Solis flushed up to the eyes; he racked his brains for an answer, and tormented the gravel with his boots. So many things occurred to him, and were rejected as silly, that the pause grew embarrassing, and he was forced to say something. "I did not venture to pronounce your name . . ." he said at last, and got no further.

"A schoolmaster!" she went on.

"Oh! I shall be a schoolmaster for the sake of a secure

position, mademoiselle, but I want to do other things as well, something great that wants doing. . . . I should like some bit of historical research best."

"Oh!"

That "Oh," which seemed to cover the speaker's private reflections, added to the young man's embarrassment. He began to laugh foolishly, and said—"You are making me talk about my own affairs, mademoiselle, when I should speak to you of yourself."

"I think my mother and your uncle must have finished their talk," she said, looking at the parlor windows.

"Your mother looked very much altered, I thought."

"She is in trouble, and says nothing to us about her troubles, and we can only feel sorry for her, that is all we can do."

As a matter of fact, Mme. Claes had just consulted the Abbé de Solis on a difficult case of conscience, which he alone could resolve. Ruin was clearly impending; and now that the pictures were about to be sold, she thought of keeping back a large part of the purchase money, as a sort of reserve fund to secure her children against want. Balthazar took so little heed of his affairs that it would be easy to do this without his knowledge. After mature deliberation, and after taking all the facts of the case into consideration, the old Dominican had given his sanction to this prudent course. The conduct of the sale devolved on him, and the whole matter was arranged privately for fear of injuring M. Claes's credit.

The old Abbé sent his nephew to Amsterdam duly armed with letters of introduction; and the young man, delighted to have this opportunity of doing a service to the house of Claes, succeeded in selling the collection in the picture gallery to the celebrated bankers, Happe and Duncker, ostensibly for the sum of eighty thousand Dutch ducats, but fifteen thousand ducats were to be paid secretly over and above this amount to Mme. Claes. The pictures were so well known that a single letter from Balthazar accepting the

proposals made by Messieurs Happe and Duncker completed the bargain. Emmanuel de Solis was commissioned to receive the price of the pictures, which he remitted by other than the ordinary channels, so that Douai might know nothing of the transaction which had just taken place.

By the end of September, Balthazar had paid his debts, cleared his liabilities, and was at work once more; but the glory of the Maison Claes had departed. Yet Balthazar was so blinded by his passion that he seemed to feel no regrets; he was so confident that he could retrieve all his losses in a little while that he had reserved the right to repurchase his pictures. And as for Josephine, in her eyes the paintings were as nothing compared with the happiness of her husband and children; she filled the blank spaces in the gallery with pictures from the state apartments, and rearranged the furniture in the rooms where the family sat, so that the empty spaces on the walls should not be noticed.

Balthazar had about two hundred thousand francs with which to begin his experiments afresh, his debts were all paid, and M. de Solis and his nephew became trustees for Mme. Claes's reserve fund, which was swelled somewhat further, for gold was at a premium in those days of European wars, and the Abbé de Solis sold the ducats, receiving for them sixty six thousand francs in crowns, which were stored away in the Abbé's cellar.

For eight months Mme. Claes had the sad satisfaction of seeing her husband entirely engrossed in his work; but she never recovered from the shock received that August afternoon, and fell into a decline, from which there was no recovery. Science had Balthazar in its clutches, the disasters that befell the armies of France, the first fall of Napoleon, the return of the exiled Bourbons, all the events of those eventful years could not draw his attention from his studies; he was no longer a citizen, as he had ceased to be a husband and a father. He was a chemist.

Toward the end of the year 1814 the wasting disease that had attacked Mme. Claes had made such progress that she

could not leave her bed. She would not drag out this slow death in her own room where she had lived in her happier days, it was too full of memories, and she could not help drawing comparisons between the present and the past, which overwhelmed her with despair, so she lay downstairs in the parlor. The doctors had humored the desire of her heart, pronouncing the room to be more airy, cheerful, and convenient than her own apartment; her bed had been placed between the chimney-piece and the window, so that she could look out into the garden. The last days of her life were spent in perfecting her work on earth, in implanting in her daughters' hearts the passionate devotion of her own. She could no longer show her love for her husband, but she was free to lavish her affection on her daughters, and the charm of this life of close communion between mother and daughters was all the sweeter because it had begun so late.

The little scruples of a too sensitive affection weighed upon her, as upon all generous natures, like remorse. Her children had not always known, she thought, the love which was their due, and she tried to atone for all these imaginary wrongs; they felt her exquisite tenderness in her constant thought and care for them. She would fain have sheltered them in her heart, and nestled them beneath her failing wings, given them in one day the love that they should have had in those days when she had neglected them. Her soul was full of remorse, which gave a fervent warmth to her words and caresses; her eyes dwelt fondly on her children before the kind tones of her voice thrilled their hearts; her hand seemed always to be stretched out in benediction.

The hospitality of the Maison Claes had come to an end after the first splendid effort; Balthazar never gave another ball on the anniversary of his marriage, and saw no visitors; the house was quieter than ever, but this occasioned no surprise in Douai, for Mme. Claes's illness was a sufficient reason in itself for the change. The debts had been paid, and this had put a stop to gossip, and during the foreign occupa-

tion of Flanders and the war of the Hundred Days the chemist was completely forgotten. For two years Douai was almost in a state of siege, occupied in turn by French troops or foreign soldiers, it became a city of refuge for all nationalities and for peasants obliged to fly from the open country; people lived in fear for their property, and even in terror of their lives; and in such a time of calamity and anxiety no one had a thought to spare for others. The Abbé de Solis and his nephew, and the two Pierquins, were Mme. Claes's only visitors.

The winter of 1814–1815 was a long and most painful agony for her. Her husband seldom came to see her. He sat with her after dinner, it is true, for a few hours; but she had not sufficient strength now to keep up a long conversation; and when he had repeated two or three remarks, which he never varied, he sat beside her without speaking, and the dismal silence in the parlor was unbroken. The only breaks in this dreary monotony were the evenings when the Abbé de Solis and his nephew came to the Maison Claes. The old Abbé played backgammon with Balthazar, while Marguerite, seated at her mother's bedside, talked with Emmanuel. Mme. Claes smiled on their innocent happiness, and would not let them see how sweet and how painful it was to her aching heart to feel the fresh breath of the dawn of love in the words that they let fall. The tones of the two young voices, so full of charm for the lovers, almost broke her heart; she surprised a glance of comprehension exchanged between them, and memories of her youth and the happy past brought her thoughts to the present, and she felt all its bitterness to the full as she lay there like one already dead. Emmanuel and Marguerite instinctively divined her sufferings, and delicacy of feeling led them to check the sweet playfulness of love lest it should add to her pain.

No one as yet seems to have discovered that our sentiments have a life of their own, and take their character from the circumstances which gave them birth; the places in which they gathered strength, the thoughts that filled our

minds at the time, influence their development and leave their impress upon them. There is a love like that of Mme. Claes, passionate in its beginnings and passionate to the end; there is a love, on which everything smiles from the outset, that never loses the glad freshness of its morning, and reaps its harvest of happiness amid laughter and rejoicing; but there is also a love early enveloped in sadness or surrounded by misfortune, its pleasures are painful and dearly-bought, snatched amid fears, imbittered by remorse, or clogged with despair. This love in the depths of their hearts, which neither Marguerite nor Emmanuel recognized as yet, this feeling that had been awakened in a moment of stillness and silence beneath the dusky roof of the picture gallery, in the presence of the austere old Abbé, was tinged with something of the sober twilight hues of its earliest surroundings; it was grave and reticent, but full of subtle shades of sweetness, and furtive joys over which they lingered in secret as over stolen grapes snatched in some vineyard nook.

Beside this bed of pain they never dared to give expression to their thoughts, and all unconsciously their emotion gathered strength because it was repressed in the depths of their hearts, and only revealed itself in their care for the invalid. It seemed to Emmanuel that this drew them more closely together, and that he was already a son to Margue rite's mother; though instead of the sweet language of lovers he received only sad grateful thanks from Marguerite. Their sighs of happiness as they exchanged glances were scarcely distinguishable from the sighs drawn from them by the sight of the mother's suffering; their brief moments of felicity, implied confessions, and unspoken promises, moments when their hearts went out toward each other, stood out, like the Allegories painted by Rafael, against a dark background. Each felt a trust and confidence in the other, though no words had been said; they felt that the sun still shone, though heavy dark clouds had gathered overhead, and they knew not what wind could scatter them; the

future seemed doubtful, perhaps trouble would dog them all their lives, so they sat timidly among the gloomy shadows without daring to ask, "Shall we finish the day together?"

Yet, beneath the tenderness that Mme. Claes showed for her children, there lay concealed other thoughts to which she nobly refused to listen. Her children never caused her apprehensions and terror; they were her comfort, but they were not her life; she lived for them, but she was dying for Balthazar. Painful though it might be for her to have her husband by her side, absent in thought for whole hours, to receive an unseeing glance from time to time, yet she was unconscious of her sufferings so long as he was with her. Balthazar's indifference to his dying wife would have seemed unpardonable to any stranger who chanced to witness it, but Mme. Claes and her daughters were so used to it, and understood him so well, that they forgave him.

If Mme. Claes had some dangerous seizure in the course of the day, if she felt worse or seemed to be at the point of death, Claes was the one person in the house, or indeed in the whole town, who did not know that the wife who had once been so passionately loved was in danger. Lemulquinier knew it, but Félicie and Marguerite had been forbidden by their mother to speak to Claes of her illness.

Mme. Claes was happy when she heard his footsteps in the picture gallery as he crossed it on his way to dinner; she was about to see him, she summoned all her strength to meet the coming joy. The color rushed to the pale face of the dying woman as he entered, she almost looked as she had been wont to do in health; the man of science came to her bedside and took her hand in his, and never saw her as she really was: for him alone she was always well. In reply to his, "How are you to-day, dear wife?" she would answer, "Better, dear!" and he in his preoccupied mood readily believed her when she spoke of getting up again, of being quite well to-morrow. He was so abstracted that he never saw that there was anything seriously wrong with his wife, and thought the disease of which she was dying was some pass-

ing ailment. Every one else knew that she was dying, but for him she was full of life.

This year saw the husband and wife completely severed. Claes slept in a distant room, lived in his laboratory or study from morning to night, and never saw Pepita save in the presence of his daughters and the few friends of the house who came to visit her. He had learned to do without her. The two who had once shared every thought drifted further and further apart; the moments of close communion, of rapture, of expansion, which are the life of the heart, came seldom and more seldom, and the rare moments of bliss ceased altogether. If physical suffering had not come to her aid and filled up the empty days, the anguish of her isolation might have killed Josephine, but she was dying. She was sometimes in such terrible pain that she was glad that he, whom she never ceased to love, was not there to be a witness of her sufferings. And for the part of the evening that Balthazar spent with her, she lay watching him, feeling that he was happy after his fashion, and this happiness which she had procured for him she made her own. This meagre satisfaction must suffice for her now; she no longer asked if she was beloved; she strove to believe it, and went softly, fearing that this thin sheet of ice should give way and her heart and all her hopes should be drowned in the dark depths that yawned beneath.

Nothing ever happened to break the monotony of the days; the disease that wasted Mme. Claes's strength perhaps contributed to the apparent peace, for her affection could only play a passive part, and weakness made it easier to wait and endure patiently. The year 1816 opened under these gloomy conditions.

In the last days of February came the sudden shock which brought the angelic woman, who, so the Abbé de Solis said, was almost sinless, to the grave. The blow came from Pierquin.

He watched for an opportunity when the two girls were sufficiently far away to whisper in her ear, "Madame, M.

Claes has commissioned me to borrow three hundred thousand francs on his estates; you must take measures to secure your children's property."

Mme. Claes clasped her hands and raised her eyes. She thanked the notary by a kindly inclination of the head and by a sad smile, which touched Pierquin. The words were like the stab of a knife; they killed Pepita. The rest of the day she spent with the painful thoughts that swelled her heart; she felt like some traveller who has walked steadily and bravely along the dizzy brink of a precipice, till some pebble slips from under his feet, and, losing his balance, he at last falls headlong into the depths. As soon as the notary left the house, Mme. Claes asked Marguerite for writing materials, and summoned all her strength to write her final directions and requests. Many times she stopped and looked up at Marguerite; the time for making her confidence had come.

Marguerite had taken her mother's place as head of the household during this illness, and had more than realized the dying woman's hopes of her. Mme. Claes feared no longer for the family she was leaving under the care of this strong and loving guardian angel; she should still live on in Marguerite. Both the women doubtless felt that there were sad secrets to be told; whenever the mother glanced at Marguerite, the girl looked up at once, and the eyes of both were full of tears. Several times, as Mme. Claes laid down the pen, Marguerite had begun, "Mother? . . ." and had broken off because her voice failed her; and her mother, absorbed in her last thoughts, did not hear her entreaty. At last the letter was finished; and Marguerite, who had held the taper while it was sealed, turned away to avoid seeing the direction.

"You can read it, my child!" the dying woman said, with a heartrending tone in her voice.

Marguerite watched her mother's fingers as she wrote, *For my daughter Marguerite.*

"I will rest now," she added, putting the letter under her pillow, "and then we will talk."

She fell back on her pillows as if exhausted by the effort she had just made, and slept for several hours. When she awoke, all her children were kneeling around her in fervent prayer. It was a Thursday, Gabriel and Jean had just come home from school; Emmanuel de Solis—who for the past six months had been one of the masters there, teaching history and philosophy—had come with them.

"Dear children, we must bid each other farewell," she cried. "You are all with me to the last, and *he* . . ." She did not finish the sentence.

"M. Emmanuel," said Marguerite, who saw the deathly pallor of her mother's face, "will you tell our father that mamma is much worse?"

Young de Solis went up to the laboratory, and through Lemulquinier's good offices saw Balthazar for a moment; the chemist heard the young man's urgent entreaties, and answered, "I am coming."

"My friend," Mme. Claes said when Emmanuel returned from his errand, "will you take my two boys away, and ask your uncle to come to me? I must take the last sacraments I think, and I should like to receive them from his hand."

When she was left once more with the two girls she made a sign which Marguerite understood. Félicie was sent away, and the mother and daughter were alone.

"I had something to say to you, mamma dear," said Marguerite, who did not realize how ill her mother was, and knew nothing of the shock which Pierquin's ill-advised revelation had given her. "I have been without money for housekeeping expenses these ten days past, and the servants' wages have not been paid for six months. I have twice made up my mind to ask papa for the money, and both times my courage failed. You do not know what has happened. All the wine in the cellar and the pictures in the gallery have been sold—"

"He has not said a word about it to me!" cried Mme. Claes. "God is taking me to Himself in time, but, oh! my poor children, what will become of you?"

She spent a few moments in fervent prayer; remorse seemed to glow in her eyes.

"Marguerite," she went on, drawing the sealed envelope from its hiding-place, "if, when I am dead, you should ever be brought to misery, that is to say, if you should want bread, then open this letter and read it. Marguerite dear, love your father, but take care of your sister and brothers. In a few days, perhaps in a few hours, you will be the head of the house! Be very careful; and, Marguerite, it may very likely happen that you will have to oppose your father's wishes; for he has spent large sums already on this effort to learn a secret which, if discovered, will make him famous and bring him enormous wealth, and he is sure to want money again: perhaps he will ask you for money; and then, while you must remember that you are the sole guardian of those whose interests are committed to your care, you must never forget what is due to your father, to a great man who is spending himself, his wealth, and his whole life in a task which will make his family illustrious, and you must give him all a daughter's tenderness. He would never wrong his children intentionally; he has such a noble heart; he is so good, so full of love for you; you, who are left, will see him a kind and affectionate father once more. These things must be said, Marguerite, now that I am on the brink of the grave. Promise me, my child, that you will fill my place, if you would make it easier for me to die; promise that you will never add to your father's troubles by a single reproach, that you will never judge him harshly! In short, you must be a gentle and indulgent mediator until your task is finished, until your father once more takes his place as head of the family."

"I understand, dearest mother," said Marguerite, as she kissed the dying woman's red eyelids. "I will do as you wish."

"And you must not marry, darling, until Gabriel is old enough to take your place," Mme. Claes went on. "If you were married, your husband very likely would not share

your feelings; he might make trouble in the family, and harass your father."

Marguerite looked into her mother's eyes and said, "Have you no other counsels to give me with regard to my marriage?"

"Do you hesitate, dear child?" asked the dying mother in alarm.

"No," she answered. "I promise to obey you."

"Poor child!" said her mother, as she shed hot tears, "I could not bring myself to sacrifice myself for you, and now I am asking you to sacrifice yourself for them all. Happiness makes us selfish. Yes, Marguerite, I was weak, because I was happy. You must be strong; you must think for the rest, and so act that your brothers and your sister shall never reproach me. Love your father, and do not thwart him . . . more than you can help."

Her head fell back on the pillow, her strength had failed her, she could not say another word. The struggle between the wife and the mother had exhausted her. A few moments later the Abbé de Solis and his assistants entered the parlor, and the servants crowded in. The Abbé's presence recalled Mme. Claes to herself, and as the rite began she looked about her, seeking Balthazar among the faces about her bed.

"Where is the master?" she asked in a piteous tone, which sent a thrill of horror through those assembled; her whole life and death seemed to be summed up in that cry. Martha hurried from the room, and, old as she was, ran up to the laboratory, and knocked loudly at the door.

"Monsieur," she cried, in angry indignation, "madame is dying! They are going to administer the sacrament, and are waiting for you."

"I am coming down directly," said Balthazar.

Lemulquinier appeared a moment later, and said that his master was about to follow. Mme. Claes never took her eyes from the door all through the ceremony, but it was over before Balthazar came. The Abbé de Solis and the children

were standing beside the bed, a flush came over the dying woman's face at the sight of her husband, the tears rolled down her cheeks.

"*Were you on the point of decomposing nitrogen?*" she asked with angelic sweetness, that sent a thrill through those about her.

"I have done it!" he cried triumphantly. "Nitrogen is partly composed of oxygen, partly of some imponderable substance which to all appearance is the essential principle of—"

He suddenly stopped, interrupted by a murmur of horror, which brought him to his senses.

"What was it that they told me?" he began. "Are you really worse? . . . What has happened?"

"This," said the Abbé de Solis indignantly in Balthazar's ear, "this—your wife is dying, and you have killed her!" and without waiting for an answer, the Abbé took Emmanuel's arm and left the room; the children went with him across the courtyard. Balthazar stood for a while as if thunderstruck; he gazed at his wife with tears in his eyes.

"You are dying, and I have killed you?" he cried. "What does he mean?"

"Dear," she answered, "your love was my life, and when all unconsciously you ceased to love me, my life ceased too."

The children had come back again; Claes sent them away, and sat down by his wife's pillow. "Have I ever ceased to love you for one single moment?" he asked, taking her hand, and pressing it to his lips.

"I have no reproaches to make, dearest. You have made me very happy, too happy indeed; for the contrast between the early days of our marriage, which were so full of joy, and these last years, when you have no longer been yourself, and the days have been so empty, has been more than I could bear. Our inner life, like our physical life, has its vital springs. For the past six years you have been dead to love, to your family, to all that makes the happiness of life.

I am not thinking of the joy and bliss which are the appanage of youth, and must cease with youth, but which leaves behind them the fruits on which the soul lives afterward, an unbounded confidence and sweet established uses; you have deprived me of all these solaces of the after time. Ah! well, it is time for me to go; this is not a life together in any sense; you have hidden your thoughts and your actions from me. How can you have come to feel afraid of me? Have I ever reproached you by gesture, or word, or deed? Well, and you have sold your remaining pictures, you have even sold the wine in the cellar, and you have begun to borrow money again on your property, without a word of all this to me! Oh, I am about to take leave of life, and I am sick of life! If you make mistakes, if in striving after the impossible you lose sight of everything else, have I not shown that there was enough love in my heart to find it sweet to share your errors, to be always by your side, even, if need be, in the paths of crime? You have loved me only too well, therein lies my glory and my misery. This illness began long ago, Balthazar; it dates from the day when you first made it clear to me, here in this room where I am about to die, that the claims of science were stronger than family ties. And now your wife is dead, and you have run through your fortune. Your fortune and your wife were your own to dispose of; but when I shall be no more, all my property will pass to your children, and you will not be able to touch it. What will become of you? I must tell you the truth, and dying eyes see far. Now that I am gone, what will counterbalance this accursed passion, which is as strong in you as life itself? If I have been sacrificed to it, your children will count for very little; for, in justice to you, I must allow that I came first with you. Two millions and six years of toil have been thrown into that bottomless pit, and you have discovered nothing—"

Claes's white head sank; he hid his face with his hand.

"You will discover nothing but shame for yourself and misery for your children," continued the dying woman.

"Already they call you 'Claes the Alchemist'; a little later, and it will be 'Claes the Madman!' As for me, I believe in you; I know how great and learned you are; I know that you have genius, but ordinary minds draw no distinction between genius and madness. Glory is the sun of the dead; yours will be the fate of all greatness here on earth; you will know no happiness as long as you live. I am going now; I have had no joy of your fame, which would have consoled me for my lost happiness; and so, to sweeten the bitterness of death, let me feel certain that my children's bread is secure, my dear Balthazar. Nothing can give me peace of mind, not even your—"

"I swear," said Claes, "to—"

"No, dear, do not swear, lest you should fail to keep your word," she said, interrupting him. "It was your duty to protect us, and for nearly seven years you have failed to do so. Science is your life. Great men should have neither wife nor children; they should tread the paths of misery alone; their virtues are not those of commonplace people; such men as you belong to the whole world, not to one woman and a single family. You are like those great trees which exhaust the soil round about them, and I am the poor field-plant beside it that can never rear its head so high; I must die before half your life is spent. I have waited till my last hour to tell you these horrible truths, which have been revealed to me in anguish and despair. Have pity on our children! Again and again, until my last sigh, I entreat you to have pity on our children, that so my words may find an echo in your heart. This wife of yours is dead, you see. Slowly and gradually she has starved for lack of affection and happiness. Alas! but for the cruel kindness which you have involuntarily shown me, could I have lived so long? But the poor children! They have never failed me; they have grown with the growth of my sorrows, and the mother has outlived the wife. Have pity, have pity on our children!"

"Lemulquinier!" Balthazar thundered.

The old servant hurried into the room.

"Go up and break everything to pieces, all the machinery, and everything else. Be careful how you do it, but do it thoroughly! . . . I will have nothing more to do with science!" he said, turning to his wife.

"It is too late," she said with a glance at Lemulquinier. —"Marguerite!" she moaned, feeling that death was near. Marguerite stood in the doorway, and gave a sharp cry as she met her mother's eyes and saw the ghastly pallor of her face.

"Marguerite!" the dying woman cried again. This last word she ever spoke, uttered with a wild vehemence, seemed like a solemn summons to her daughter to take her place.

The rest of the family hurried in alarm to the bedside, in time to see her die. Mme. Claes's life had ebbed away in the final effort she had made. Balthazar and Marguerite sat motionless, she at the head, and he at the foot of the bed. The two who had best known her goodness and inexhaustible kindness could not believe that she was really dead. The glance exchanged between father and daughter was freighted with many thoughts; she judged her father, and her father trembled already lest his daughter should be the instrument of vengeance. Memories crowded upon him, memories of the love that had filled his life, and of her whose last words seemed to carry an almost sacred authority which had so stamped them on his soul that it seemed as if he must forever hear them ringing in his ears; but Balthazar mistrusted himself, he doubted whether he could resist the spirit which possessed him, he felt that the impulses of remorse had grown weaker already at the first menaces of a return of his passion, and he was afraid of himself.

When Mme. Claes was gone, every one felt that she had been the life and soul of the Maison Claes, and that now that soul was no more. And in the house itself, where her loss was felt to the full, the parlor where the noble Josephine still seemed to live was kept shut; nobody had the heart to enter it.

Society does not feel called upon to practice the virtues which it preaches to individuals; it offends hourly (though only in words) against its own canons; a jest prepares the way for base actions, a jest brings down anything beautiful or lofty to the ordinary level. If a son sheds too many tears for his father's loss, he is ridiculous; if too few, he is held up to execration; and then society, having said its say, diverts itself by weighing the dead, scarcely yet cold, in its balance.

On the evening of the day when Mme. Claes died, her friends discussed her over their whist, dropped flowers on her tomb in a pause while the cards were dealing, and paid their tribute to her noble character while sorting hearts and spades.

Then, after the usual lugubrious commonplaces, which are a kind of preliminary vocal exercise in social lamentation, and which are uttered with the same intonations and exactly the same amount of feeling all over France at every hour of the day, the whole chorus proceeded to calculate the amount of Mme. Claes's property.

Pierquin opened the discussion by pointing out that the lamented lady's husband had made her life so wretched that death was a happy release for her, and that it was a still greater blessing for her children. She would never have had sufficient firmness to oppose the wishes of the husband whom she adored, but now her fortune had passed out of Claes's hands. One and all began forthwith to reckon the probable amount of poor Mme. Claes's fortune, to calculate her savings (had she, or had she not, managed to put anything by?), and made out inventories of her jewels, and ransacked her drawers and her wardrobe, while her bereaved family were yet kneeling in prayer and tears by her bed of death.

With the experienced eye of a sworn valuer, Pierquin took in the situation at a glance. He was of the opinion that all Mme. Claes's property might be "got together again" (to use his own expression), and should amount to

something like fifteen hundred thousand francs. A large part of this was represented by the forests of Waignies; that property had risen enormously in value in the last twelve years, and he made a rapid computation of the probable value of the trees of all ages from the oldest to the youngest. If that was not sufficient, Balthazar had probably enough to "cover" the children's claims. Mlle. Claes was, therefore, still, in his peculiar phraseology, a girl "worth four hundred thousand francs."

"But if she does not marry pretty soon," he added, "M. Claes will ruin his children; he is just the man to do it. If she were married she would be emancipated from her father's control, and could compel him to sell the forest of Waignies, to divide it among them, and to invest the shares of the minors in such a way that their father could not touch them."

Every one began to suggest the names of various young men of the province who might aspire to the hand of Mlle. Claes, but no one flattered the notary so far as to include him in the list. Pierquin raised so many objections to all the proposed suitors, and considered none of them worthy of Marguerite, that the company exchanged significant smiles, and amused themselves by teasing the notary, prolonging the process in provincial fashion. To Pierquin it seemed that Mme. Claes's death was likely to assist his cause, and he already began to cut up the dead for his own benefit.

"That good lady yonder," said he to himself, as he went home that night, "was as proud as a peacock; she would never have allowed me to marry a daughter of hers. Eh! eh! but if I play my cards well now, why should I not marry the girl? Old Claes has carbon on the brain, and does not care what becomes of his children; if I ask him for his daughter, as soon as I have convinced Marguerite that she must marry for her brothers' and sister's sake, he will be glad enough to be rid of a girl who may give him a good deal of trouble."

He fell asleep in the midst of his meditations on the advantages of this match, so attractive to him on so many

grounds, a marriage which bade fair to secure his complete happiness. It would have been hard to find a more delicately lovely or a better bred girl in the province. Marguerite was as modest and graceful as the fair flower which Emmanuel had not dared to mention before her, lest he should reveal the secret wishes of his heart. She had religious principles and instinctive pride; his honor would be safe in her keeping. This marriage would not only gratify the vanity which enters more or less into every man's choice of a wife, but the notary's pride would be satisfied; an alliance with a twice-ennobled family, which bore one of the most distinguished names in Flanders, would reflect lustre upon him.

The very next morning Pierquin went to his strong-box, and thence drew several notes of a thousand francs each, which he pressed on Balthazar, in order to spare his cousin any petty pecuniary annoyances in his grief. Balthazar would no doubt feel touched by the delicate attention, and speak of it to his daughter with an accompanying panegyric on the good qualities of the notary and his kindness of heart. But Balthazar did nothing of the kind. Neither M. Claes nor his daughter saw anything extraordinary in this action; they were so taken up with their grief that they scarcely gave a thought to Pierquin. Indeed, Balthazar's despair was so great that those who had been disposed to blame his previous conduct now relented and forgave him, not on the score of his devotion to science, but because of the tardy remorse which would never repair the evil. The world is quite satisfied with grimaces; it takes current coin without inquiring too curiously whether or no the metal is base; the sight of pain has a certain dramatic interest, it is a sort of enjoyment in consideration of which the world is prepared to pardon everything, even to a criminal. The world craves sensation so eagerly that it absolves with equal readiness those who move it to laughter or to tears, without demanding a strict account of the means employed in either case.

Marguerite had just completed her nineteenth year when her father intrusted the management of the household into her hands; her brothers and sister remembered that their mother in the last moments of her life had bidden them obey their oldest sister, and her authority was dutifully recognized. Her delicate, pale face looked paler still by contrast with her mourning, as its sweet and patient expression was enhanced by sadness. From the very first it was abundantly evident that she possessed the womanly courage, the fortitude, and constant serenity which ministering angels surely bring to their task of healing, as they lay their green palm branches on aching hearts. But although she had early understood the duties laid upon her, and had accustomed herself to hide her sorrow, it was none the less deep; and the serenity of her face was little in keeping with the vehemence of her grief. It was to be a part of her early experience to know the pain of repressing the sorrow and love with which the heart overflows; henceforward the generous instincts of youth were to be curbed continually at the bidding of tyrannous necessity. After her mother's death she found herself involved at once in intricate problems where serious interests were at stake, and this at an age when a girl usually thinks of nothing but pleasure. The hard discipline of pain has never been lacking for angelic natures.

A love which has vanity and greed for its twin supporters is the most stubborn of passions. Pierquin meant to lose no time in surrounding the heiress. The family had scarcely put on mourning when he found an opportunity of speaking to Marguerite; and began his operations with such skill that she might well have been deceived by his tactics. But love had brought a faculty of clairvoyance, and Marguerite was not to be deceived, although Pierquin's good-nature, the good-nature of a notary who shows his affection by saving his client's money, gave some appearance of truth to his specious sentimentalities. The notary felt strong in his hazy relationship, in his acquaintance with family secrets and

business affairs, in the esteem and friendship of Marguerite's father. The very abstractedness of that father, who was not likely to form any projects for his daughter's settlement in life, made for Pierquin's cause. He thought it quite impossible that Marguerite could have any predilection, and submitted his suit to her, though he was not clever enough to disguise beneath the flimsy veil of feigned passion the interested motives that had led him to scheme for this alliance, which are always hateful to young souls. In fact, they had changed places; the notary's revelation of selfishness was artless, and Marguerite was on her guard; for he thought that he had to do with a defenceless girl, and had no regard for the privileges of weakness.

"My dear cousin," he began, as he walked up and down the paths in the little garden, "you know my heart, and you know also how I shrink from intruding on your grief at such a moment. I ought not to be a notary, I am far too sensitive; I have such a feeling heart; but I am always forced to dwell on prosaic questions of interest when I would fain yield to the softer emotions which make life happy. It is very painful to me to be compelled to speak to you of matters which must jar upon your present feelings; but it cannot be helped. You have constantly been in my thoughts for the past few days. I have just discovered, by a curious chance, that your brothers' and your sister's fortunes, and even your own, are imperilled. It rests with you to save your family from utter ruin."

"What ought we to do?" she asked, somewhat alarmed at these remarks.

"You should marry," answered Pierquin.

"I shall do nothing of the kind," she exclaimed.

"You will marry," returned the notary, "after mature reflection on the critical condition of your affairs."

"How can my marriage save us from—?"

"That was what I was waiting to hear, cousin," he broke in. "Marriage emancipates a girl."

"Why should I be emancipated?" asked Marguerite.

"To put you in possession of your rights, my dear little cousin," replied the notary, with an air of triumph. "In that event you would take your share of your mother's fortune; and before you can take your share, her property must be liquidated, and that would mean a forced sale of the forest of Waignies. That once settled, all the capital would be realized, and your father would be bound, as guardian, to invest your sister's share and your brothers' in such a way that chemistry could not touch it."

"And suppose that none of these things happen—what then?" asked she.

"Why, in that case," said the notary, "your father would administer the estate. If he takes it into his head again to make gold, there is nothing to prevent him from selling the forest of Waignies, and leaving you all as bare as shorn lambs. The forest of Waignies is worth about fourteen hundred thousand francs at this moment, but your father may cut down every stick of timber any day, and the thirteen hundred acres of land will not fetch three hundred thousand francs. This is almost sure to happen; and would it not be wiser to prevent it by raising the question at once, by emancipating yourself and demanding your share of the inheritance? You would save in other ways; your father would not fell the timber as he otherwise would do from time to time, to your prejudice. Just now chemistry is dormant, and of course he would invest the money realized by the sale in consols. The funds are at fifty-nine, so the dear children would have very nearly five thousand livres of interest on fifty thousand francs. Besides, as it is illegal to spend a minor's capital, your brothers and sister would find their fortune doubled by the time they came of age. Now, on the other hand, my word! . . . There you have the whole position! . . . Not only so, but your father has dipped pretty heavily into your mother's property; and when the inventory is made out, we shall see what the deficit amounts to. If there is a balance owing, you can take a mortgage on his lands, and save something in that way."

"For shame!" said Marguerite; "that would be an insult to my father. It is not so long since my mother's last words were uttered, that I should have forgotten them already. My father is incapable of robbing his children," she added, with bitter tears in her eyes. "You do not know him, M. Pierquin."

"But suppose, my dear cousin, that your father betakes himself to chemistry again—"

"We should be ruined, should we not?"

"Oh! utterly ruined! Believe me, Marguerite," he said, taking her hand and pressing it to his heart; "believe me, I should fail in my duty if I did not urge this course upon you. Your interests alone—"

"Monsieur," returned Marguerite coolly, as she withdrew her hand, "the real interests of my family demand that I should not marry. That was my mother's decision."

"Cousin!" he cried, with the conviction of a man of business who sees a fortune squandered, "you are rushing on your own destruction; you might as well fling your mother's money into the water. . . . Well, for you I will show the devotion of the warm friendship I feel for you. You do not know how much I love you; I have adored you ever since I saw you on the day of the last ball that your father gave. You were charming! You may trust the voice of the heart when it speaks of your interests, dear Marguerite. . . ."

There was a moment's silence; then he went on, "Yes, we will summon a family council, and emancipate you without consulting you about it."

"But what does 'emancipation' mean?"

"It means that you will come into possession of your rights."

"Then, if I can be emancipated in this way, why would you have me marry? . . . And to whom?"

Pierquin did his best to look tenderly at his cousin, but the expression of his face was so at variance with the hard eyes that usually only grew eloquent over money, that Mar-

guerite fancied she saw an interested motive in this affectionate impromptu.

"You should marry a man whom you cared for . . . in your own circle . . ." he got out. "You must have a husband, if it were only to manage your business affairs. You will be left face to face with your father; and can you hold your own against him, all by yourself?"

"Yes, monsieur; I shall find means to defend my brothers and sister when the time comes."

"Plague take the girl!" thought Pierquin to himself. Aloud he said, "No; you will never be able to stand out against him."

"Let us say no more about it," she replied.

"Good-by, cousin. I shall do my best to serve you in spite of yourself; I shall show you how much I love you by preventing a misfortune which every one in the town foresees."

"Thank you for the interest you take in me, but I beg of you neither to say nor do anything that can give my father the slightest annoyance."

Marguerite thoughtfully watched Pierquin's retreating figure, and could not help comparing his metallic voice, his manners, supple as steel springs, his glances, which expressed servility rather than gentleness, with the mute revelation of Emmanuel's feelings toward her, which impressed her as music or poetry might.

In every word we speak, in every action of our lives, there is a strange magnetic power which makes itself felt, and which never deceives. The glances, the tones of the voice, the lover's impassioned gestures, can be imitated; a clever actor may perhaps deceive an inexperienced girl, but to be successful he should have the field to himself. If there is another soul which vibrates in unison with every feeling that stirs her own, will she not soon find out the difference between love and its semblance? Emmanuel at this moment, like Marguerite herself, was under the influence of the clouds which had gathered about them ever

since that first meeting in the picture gallery; the blue heaven of love was hidden from their eyes. He had singled her out for a worship which, from its very hopelessness, was tender, mysterious, and reverent in its manifestations. Socially he was too far beneath Mlle. Claes to hope to be accepted as her husband; he was poor, and had nothing but a noble name to offer her. Then he had waited and waited for some slight encouragement, which Marguerite would not give him beneath the eyes of a dying mother.

Equally pure, they had not as yet spoken a word of love. Their joys had been the secret joys which unhappy souls must perforce linger over alone. The same hope had, indeed, thrilled them both, but they had trembled and remained apart; they seemed to fear themselves, conscious that each belonged too surely to the other. Emmanuel, therefore, feared to touch with his lips the hand of the sovereign lady whom he had enshrined in his heart. The slightest careless contact would have brought such an intoxication of delight that his senses would have been beyond his control; he would no longer have been master of himself. But if they had never exchanged the slight yet significant, the innocent and solemn tokens of love which even the most timid lovers permit themselves, each dwelt no less in the other's heart, and both knew that they were ready to make the greatest sacrifices, the only pleasures that they could know. Ever since Mme. Claes's death the love in the depth of their hearts had been shrouded in mourning. The gloom in which they lived had deepened into night, and every ray of hope was quenched in tears. Marguerite's reserve had changed to something like coldness, for she felt bound to keep the vow which her mother had demanded of her; and now that she had more liberty than formerly, she became more distant. Emmanuel had shared in her mourning, feeling with his beloved that the least word or wish of love at such a time would be treason against the sovereign laws of the heart. So this passionate love was hidden away more closely than ever. The two souls were in unison, but

sorrow had come between them and separated them as effectually as the timidity of youth and respect for the sufferings of her who was now dead; yet there was still left to them the magnificent language of the eyes, the mute eloquence of self-sacrifice, the knowledge that one thought always possessed them both—sublime harmonies of youth, the first steps of love in its infancy.

Emmanuel came every morning for news of Claes and of Marguerite, but he never came into the dining-room, where the family now sat, unless he brought a letter from Gabriel, or Balthazar invited him to enter. Numberless sympathetic thoughts were revealed in his first glance at the girl before him; the reserve that compelled him to assume a conventional demeanor harassed him; but he respected it, and shared the sorrow which caused it, and all the dew of his tears was shed on the heart of his beloved in a glance unspoiled by any afterthought. He lived so evidently in the present moment, he set such high value on a happiness which he thought so fleeting, that Marguerite's heart sometimes smote her, and she told herself that she was ungenerous not to hold out her hand and say, "Let us be friends."

Pierquin still continued his importunities with the obstinacy which is the patience of dulness, possessed by one idea. He judged Marguerite by the ordinary rules of the multitude when judging of women. He imagined that when the words "marriage," "liberty," and "fortune" had been let fall in her hearing they would take root in her mind, and spring up and blossom into wishes which he could turn to his own advantage, and he chose to think that her coldness was nothing but dissimulation. But in spite of all his polite attentions, he was an awkward actor; he sometimes forgot his part and assumed the despotic tone of a man who is accustomed to make the final decision in all serious questions relating to family life. For her benefit he repeated consoling platitudes, the professional commonplaces which creep like snails over a sorrow, and leave behind them a track of barren words that profane the sanctity of grief. His tenderness

was simply cajolery; he dropped his feigned melancholy at the door when he put on his overshoes and took up his umbrella. He took advantage of the privileges which his long intimacy with the Maison Claes had given him, using them as a means of ingratiating himself with the rest of the family to bring Marguerite to make a marriage which was already talked of in the town. So, in strong contrast to a true-hearted, devoted, and respectful love was opposed its selfish and calculating semblance. The characters of both men were in harmony with their manner. The one feigned a passion which he did not feel, and seized on every least advantage that gave him a hold on Marguerite; the other concealed his love, and trembled lest his devotion should be too apparent.

Some time after her mother's death, and, as it happened, in one day, Marguerite had an opportunity of comparing the two men whom she was in a position to judge, for she was compelled to live in a social solitude which made her inaccessible to any who might have thought of asking her in marriage.

One day, after breakfast, on one of the sunniest mornings of early April, Emmanuel chanced to call just as M. Claes was going out. Balthazar found his own house almost unendurable, and spent a large part of the day in walking about the ramparts. Emmanuel turned, as though he meant to follow Balthazar, hesitated, seemed to gather up his courage, glanced at Marguerite, and stayed. Marguerite felt sure that he wished to speak with her, and asked him to go into the garden; she sent Félicie to sit with Martha, who was sewing in the antechamber on an upper floor, and then seated herself on a garden seat in full view of her sister and the old duenna.

"M. Claes is as much absorbed by his grief as he used to be by science," said the young man as he watched Balthazar pacing slowly across the court. "Every one in Douai is sorry for him; he goes about like a man who has not got his wits about him; he suddenly stops short without a reason, and gazes about him and sees nothing—"

"Every one expresses sorrow in a different way," said Marguerite, keeping back the tears. "What did you wish to say to me?" she added, with cold dignity, after a pause.

"Mademoiselle," Emmanuel replied in an unsteady voice, "I scarcely know if I have a right to speak to you as I am about to do. Please, think only of my desire to serve you, and believe that a schoolmaster may be so much interested in his pupils as to feel anxious about their future. Your brother Gabriel is over fifteen now; he is in the second class; it is surely time to think about his probable career, and to arrange his course of study accordingly. The decision rests of course with your father, but if he gives it no thought, it may be a serious matter for Gabriel. And yet it would be a mortification to your father, would it not, if you pointed out to him that he was neglecting his son? So, as things are, could you not yourself consult Gabriel as to his inclinations, and help him to choose a course of study, so that if your father at a later day should wish him to enter the civil service or to make a soldier of him, Gabriel will be prepared for his post by a special training? I am sure that neither you nor M. Claes would wish to bring up Gabriel in idleness—"

"Oh, no!" said Marguerite. "Thank you, M. Emmanuel, you are quite right. When our mother had us taught how to make lace, and took such pains with our drawing, sewing, music, and embroidery, she often said that we could not tell what might happen, and that we must be prepared for everything. Gabriel ought to have resources within himself, so he must have a thorough education. But what is the best career for a man to choose?"

Emmanuel trembled with happiness. "Mademoiselle," he said, "Gabriel is at the head of his class in mathematics; if he were to enter the Ecole polytechnique, I feel sure that he would acquire practical knowledge there which would be useful to him afterward all through his life. He would be free to choose a career after his own inclinations after he left the Ecole, and you would have gained time without bind-

ing him down to any programme. Men who distinguish themselves there are always sought after. Diplomatists, scholars, administrators, engineers, generals, sailors, magistrates, manufacturers, and bankers are all educated at the Ecole. So it is nothing at all extraordinary that a young man belonging to a great or wealthy family should study to qualify for admission. If Gabriel should make up his mind to this, I would ask you . . . will you grant me my request? Say Yes."

"What is it?"

"Let me be his tutor?" he said nervously.

Marguerite looked at M. de Solis, then she took his hand and said, "Yes."

She was silent for a moment, then she added in an unsteady voice—"How much I value the delicacy which has led you to offer something that I can accept from you. In all that you have just said I can see how much you have thought for us. Thank you."

Simply as these words were said, Emmanuel turned his head away lest Marguerite should see the tears of happiness in his eyes; he was overcome by the delight of being useful to her.

"I will bring them both to see you," he went on when he had recovered his self-possession. "To-morrow is a holiday." He rose and took leave of Marguerite, who shortly followed him to the house; as he crossed the court he still saw her standing by the dining-room door, and received a last friendly sign of farewell.

After dinner the notary came to call on M. Claes. Marguerite and her father were out in the garden, and Pierquin took up his position between them on the very bench where Emmanuel had sat that morning.

"My dear cousin," he said, addressing Balthazar, "I have come to talk about business to-night. Forty-two days have now elapsed since your lamented wife's demise—"

"I have not noticed how the time went," said Claes, brushing away a tear that rose at the technical term *demise*.

"Oh! monsieur," cried Marguerite, with a glance at the lawyer, "how can you?"

"But, my dear Marguerite, we lawyers are obliged to consider the limits of the time prescribed by law. This matter more particularly concerns you and your co-heirs. All M. Claes's children are under age, so within forty-five days of his wife's demise he is bound to have an inventory made out, so as to ascertain the value of the estate they held in common. How are we to find out if it is solvent or no, and whether there is enough to satisfy the minors' claims?"

Marguerite rose.

"Do not go away, cousin," said Pierquin; "this matter concerns you as well as your father. You know how deeply I feel your grief, but you must give your attention at once to these requirements of the law, otherwise you may both get into serious trouble. I am simply doing my duty as legal adviser to the family."

"He is quite right," said Claes.

"The time expires in two days," Pierquin continued, "and I must set to work to-morrow to make out the inventory, if it is only to postpone the payment of legacy duty which the Treasury will demand very shortly. The Treasury is not disturbed by compunction, and has no heart; it sets its claws in us at all seasons. So my clerk and I will come here every day from ten to four with M. Raparlier the valuer. As soon as we have finished here in the town, we will go into the country. We can talk about the forest of Waignies by and by. So that is settled, and now let us turn our attention to another point. We must call a family council, and appoint a guardian. M. Conyncks of Bruges is your nearest living relative, but he unluckily has become a Belgian citizen. You ought to write to him, cousin, and find out whether the old gentleman has any notion of settling in France; he has a fine property on this side of the frontier; and you might perhaps induce him and his daughter to move into French Flanders. If he declines to make a change, I

will see about arranging for a council of some of the nearer remaining relations."

"What is the use of an inventory?" asked Marguerite.

"To find out how the property stands, and ascertain the assets and debts. When it is all clearly scheduled, the family council takes such steps as it deems necessary on behalf of the minors—"

"Pierquin," said Claes, as he rose from the garden-seat, "do anything that you think necessary to protect my children's interests, but spare us the distress of selling anything that belonged to my dear wife—"

He did not finish the sentence, but he spoke with so much dignity, there was such deep feeling in his tones, that Marguerite took her father's hand in hers and kissed it.

"I will return to-morrow, then," said Pierquin.

"Come and breakfast with us," said Balthazar. He seemed to be collecting scattered memories together, for in a moment he exclaimed: "But in my marriage contract, which was drawn up according to the custom of Hainault, I released my wife from the obligation of making an inventory, in order to spare her the worry and annoyance, and it is quite probable that I was likewise released—"

"Oh! how fortunate!" cried Marguerite. "It would have given us so much trouble—"

"Very well," said Pierquin, who was rather put out; "we will look into your marriage contract to-morrow."

"Then you did not know of this?" said Marguerite, an inquiry which put an end to the interview, for the notary was so much embarrassed by his cousin's homethrust that he was glad to abandon the discussion.

"The devil is in it!" said he to himself as he crossed the courtyard. "That man, for all his abstractedness, can find his wandering wits in the nick of time, and put a stop to our precautions against him. He will squander his children's money, it is as plain as that two and two make four. Talk of business to a girl of nineteen, and she gets sentimental over it! Here am I racking my brains to save the property

of those children by regular means, by coming to an understanding with old Conyncks, and this is the end of it! I have thrown away all my chances with Marguerite; she is sure to ask her father why I wanted an inventory of the property, which she now fancies to be quite unnecessary, and Claes, of course, will tell her that lawyers have a craze for drawing up documents; that we are notaries first, and cousins and friends, and what not, afterward; all sorts of rubbish, in fact. . . ."

He slammed the door, storming inwardly at clients who let their sentimentality ruin them.

Balthazar was right. The inventory did not take place. So nothing was done to limit or define the father's powers over his children's property.

Several months went by, and brought no changes to the Maison Claes. Gabriel, under the able tuition of M. de Solis, studied hard, learned the necessary foreign languages, and prepared to pass the entrance examination at the Ecole polytechnique. Félicie and Marguerite lived in absolute retirement; but, nevertheless, they spent the summer at their father's country house, in order to economize. M. Claes was much occupied by his business affairs; he paid his debts, raising the money on his own property, and went to visit the forest of Waignies.

By the middle of the year 1817 his grief had gradually abated, and he began to feel depressed by the dulness and sameness of the life he led. At first he resisted temptation bravely, and would not allow himself to think of chemistry; but the love of science was only dormant, and in spite of himself his thoughts turned toward his old pursuits. Then he thought he would not begin his experiments; he would not take up his science practically, he would confine himself to theory; but the longer he dwelt with these theories, the stronger his passion grew, and he began to equivocate with himself. He asked himself whether he was really bound not to prosecute his researches, and remembered how his wife had refused his oath. He had certainly vowed to himself

that he would make no further attempt to solve the great Problem, but the road to success had never been so certain and so plain; was he not surely free to change his mind now that the way was clear? He was then fifty-nine years of age, and his idea possessed him now with the dogged fixity which slowly develops into monomania. Outward circumstances also combined to shake his wavering loyalty.

Europe was at peace. Men of science of various nationalities, cut off from all communication with each other by twenty years of wars, were now free to correspond and to communicate their discoveries and theories to each other. Science was making great strides. Claes found that modern discoveries had a bearing, which his fellow chemists did not suspect, upon the Problem of the Absolute. Learned men who were devoting their lives to the solution of other scientific enigmas began to think, as he did, that light and heat, and galvanism and electricity, were only different effects of the same cause, and that all the various substances which had hitherto been regarded as different elements were merely allotropic forms of the same unknown element. The fear that some other chemist might effect the reduction of metals and find the principle of electricity (two discoveries which would lead to the solution of the Problem of the Absolute), raised the enthusiasm, which the people of Douai called a mania, to the highest pitch; only those who have felt a like passionate love of science, or who have known the tyranny of ideas, can imagine the force of the paroxysm. Balthazar's frenzy was but the more violent because it had been so long subdued, and now broke out afresh.

Marguerite, who had been watching her father very closely, divined this crisis, and opened the long-closed parlor. She thought that if they sat in that room once more, old painful memories of her mother's death would be awakened, and would act as a restraint, and she was to some extent successful. For a little while her father's grief was reawakened, and the inevitable plunge into the abyss was deferred, but it was only for a little while. She determined

to go into society once more, and so to distract Balthazar's attention from these thoughts. Several good marriages were proposed for her, over which Claes deliberated, but Marguerite said that until she was twenty-five she would not marry. In spite of all his daughter's endeavors, in spite of remorseful inner struggles, Balthazar began his experiments again in the early days of the winter. At first they were conducted secretly, but it was not easy to hide such occupations as his from the inquisitive eyes of the maid-servants.

One day, therefore, while Marguerite was dressing, Martha said to her, "Mademoiselle, it is all over with us! That wretch of a Mulquinier (who is the devil himself in human shape, for I have never seen him cross himself) has gone up into the attic again. There is the master on the highroad to hell! Heaven send that he may not be the death of you all, as he was the death of the poor dear mistress!"

"Impossible!" said Marguerite.

"Come and see their goings-on for yourself."

Mlle. Claes sprang to the window, and saw, in fact, a thin streak of smoke rising from the laboratory chimney.

"I shall be twenty-one in a few months' time," she thought, "and then our property must be squandered no longer; I must find a way to prevent it."

When Balthazar finally gave way to his passion, his respect for his children's interests was, of course, less of a restraint than his affection for his wife had been. Such barriers were easily overleaped, his conscience was more elastic, his passion had grown stronger. Glory, and hard work, and hope, and misery lay before him; he set out on his way with the energy of full and entire conviction. He felt so sure of the outcome of it all that he worked day and night, flinging himself into his pursuits with a zeal that alarmed his daughters; they did not know that a man's health seldom suffers from the work that he loves and does for its own sake.

As soon as her father began his experiments, Marguerite reduced the expenses of housekeeping, and became almost as parsimonious as a miser. Josette and Martha entered into her plans, and seconded her loyally. As for Claes, he was scarcely aware of these retrenchments; he did not notice that they had been reduced to the bare necessaries of life. He began by staying away from the family breakfast; then the whole day was spent in the laboratory, and he only came down to dinner, and sat for a few silent hours afterward in the evening in the parlor with the two girls. He never spoke to them; he did not seem to hear them when they wished him good-night; he mechanically let them kiss him on both cheeks. Such neglect as this might have brought about serious consequences if Marguerite had not wielded a mother's authority, if the love in her heart had not been a safeguard.

Pierquin had discontinued his visits entirely; in his opinion nothing could save his cousins from utter ruin. Balthazar's estates, which were worth about two hundred thousand crowns, and brought in sixteen thousand francs, were already incumbered with mortgages to the amount of three hundred thousand francs. Claes had inaugurated his second epoch of scientific enthusiasm by a heavy loan. At that moment his income just sufficed to pay the interest on his debts; and as, with the improvidence characteristic of men who live for an idea, he had made over all the rents of his farms to Marguerite to defray the expenses of the housekeeping, the notary calculated that the end must come in three years' time, when everything would go to rack and ruin, and the sheriff's officers would eat up all that Balthazar had left. Under the influence of Marguerite's coldness, Pierquin's indifference had almost become hostility. He meant to secure his retreat in case his cousin should grow so poor that he might no longer wish to marry her, and spoke of the Claes everywhere in a pitying tone.

"Poor things, they are in a fair way to be ruined," said he. "I did everything I could to save them; but, would

you believe it? Mlle. Claes herself set her face against every plan by which the law could step in to secure those children from starvation."

Emmanuel, through his uncle's influence, had been ap pointed headmaster of the Collège de Douai, his own personal qualifications having eminently fitted him for the post. He came almost every evening to see the two girls, who summoned their old duenna to the parlor so soon as their father left them for the night. Always at the same hour they heard the knock at the door: young M. de Solis was never late. For the past three months Marguerite's mute gratitude and graciousness had given him confidence; he had developed, and was himself. His purity of soul shone like a flawless diamond, and Marguerite learned to know the full value of his steadfast strength of character, when she saw that it had its source in the depths of his nature. She saw the blossoms open out one by one; hitherto she had only known of them by their fragrance. Every day Emmanuel realized some hope of hers, new splendors lighted up the enchanted country of love, the clouds vanished, the sky grew clear and serene, unsuspected treasures which had been hidden in the gloom shone forth. For Emmanuel was more at his ease; he could display the winning grace of the heart, the infectious gayety of youth, the simplicity that comes of a life of study, the treasures of a fastidious mind and unsophisticated nature, the innocent merriment that suits so well with youthful love. Marguerite and Emmanuel understood each other better; together they had explored the depths of their hearts, and had found the same thoughts, pearls of the same lustre, blended notes of harmony, as clear and sweet as the magic music which holds the divers spellbound under the sea. They had come to know each other through the interchange of ideas in the course of those evening talks, studying each other with a curiosity that grew to be a delicate imaginative sympathy. There was no bashfulness on either side, but perhaps some coquetry. The hours which Emmanuel spent with the two girls under Martha's

eyes reconciled Marguerite to her life of anguish and resignation; the love that grew unconsciously was her support in her troubles. Emmanuel's affection expressed itself with the natural grace that is irresistible, with the delicate and delightful wit that reveals fresh phases of deep feeling, as the facets of a precious stone set free all its hidden fires; the wonderful devices that love teaches lovers, which render a woman loyally responsive to the hand of the artist who sets new life into the old forms, to the tones of the voice which give a new significance to a phrase each time it is repeated. Love is not merely a sentiment, it is an art. A bare word, a hesitation, a nothing, reveals to a woman the presence of the great and sublime artist who can touch her heart without withering it. The further Emmanuel went, the more charming were the ways in which his love expressed itself.

"I have outstripped Pierquin," he said one evening; "I am the bearer of bad tidings that he is going to bring, but I thought I would rather tell them myself. Your father has sold your forest to some speculators, who have taken the timber as it stands to sell again in smaller quantities; the trees have been cut down already, and all the trunks have been taken away. Three hundred thousand francs were paid down at once, and this was sent to Paris to discharge M. Claes's debts there; but in order to clear his debts entirely he has been forced to assign to his creditors a hundred thousand francs out of the hundred thousand crowns still due to him on the purchase-money."

Just at that point Pierquin came in.

"Well, my dear cousin," he said, "you are ruined, you see! I told you how it would be, but you would not listen to me. Your father has a good appetite; he only made one bite of your forest. Your guardian, M. Conyncks, is away at Amsterdam, where he is negotiating the sale of his Belgian estates, and while his back is turned Claes seizes the opportunity to do this stroke of business. It is hardly fair. I have just written to old Conyncks, but it will be all up with you by the time he gets here. You will be obliged to

take proceedings against your father. It will not take very long to settle the affair in a court of law, but Claes will not come out of it very well; M. Conyncks will be compelled to take action, the law requires it in such cases. And all this has come of your wilfulness! Do you see now how prudent I was, and how devoted to your interests?"

"I have some good news for you, mademoiselle," said young de Solis in his gentle voice: "Gabriel has been admitted as a pupil at the Ecole polytechnique; the difficulties which were raised at first have been cleared away."

Marguerite thanked him by a smile, and said, "Then I shall find a use for my savings.—Martha," she added, speaking to the old servant, "we must begin at once to make ready Gabriel's outfit. Poor Félicie, we both must work hard," she said, with a kiss on her sister's forehead.

"He will return home to-morrow, and you will have him here for about ten days; on the 15th of November he must be in Paris."

"Cousin Gabriel is well advised," said the notary, as he scanned the headmaster; "he will have to make his way in the world. But now, my dear Marguerite, the honor of the family is at stake; will you listen to me this time?"

"Not if it is a question of marriage."

"But what will you do?"

"Nothing, cousin. . . . What should I do?"

"You are of age."

"I shall be of age in a few days' time. Is there any course which you can suggest that will reconcile our interests with our duty to our father and with the honor of the family?"

"You can do nothing, cousin, without your uncle. That is clear. When he comes back to Douai I will call again."

"Good-evening, monsieur," said Marguerite.

"The poorer she grows, the more airs she gives herself," thought the notary. Aloud he said, "Good-evening, mademoiselle.—M. de Solis, I have the honor to wish you good-

day," and he went away without paying any attention to Félicie or to Martha.

When the door closed on him, Emmanuel spoke, with hesitation in his voice. "I have been studying the Code for the past two days," he said, "and I have taken counsel with an old lawyer, one of my uncle's friends. If you will allow me, I will go to Amsterdam to-morrow. . . . Listen, dear Marguerite . . ."

He had spoken her name for the first time. She thanked him by a glance and a gentle inclination of the head, and listened smiling, though her eyes were full of tears.

"You can speak before my sister," said Marguerite; "she has no need to learn resignation to a life of hardship and toil, she is so brave and sweet; but from this discussion she will learn how much we need all our courage."

The two sisters clasped each other's hands, as if to renew the pledge of the closer union brought about by a common trouble.

"Leave us, Martha."

"Dear Marguerite," Emmanuel began, and something of the happiness that he felt at thus acquiring one of the least privileges of affection could be felt in his voice, "I have the names and addresses of the purchasers, who have not yet paid the balance of two hundred thousand francs for the felled timber. To-morrow, if you give your consent, a lawyer acting in M. Conyncks's name shall serve a writ of attachment on them. Your great-uncle will return in a week's time. He will call a family council and emancipate Gabriel, who is now eighteen. When that has been done, you and your brother will be in a position to demand your rights, and you can require your share of the proceeds of this sale of the wood. M. Claes could not refuse you the two hundred thousand francs which have been attached; as for the remaining hundred thousand francs, they could be secured to you by a mortgage on this house that you are living in. M. Conyncks will demand securities for the three hundred thousand francs which belong to Mademoiselle Félicie and

to Jean, and your father will be obliged to mortgage his property in the plains of Orchies, which are already incumbered with a debt of a hundred thousand crowns. The law regards mortgages for the benefit of minors as a first charge, so everything will be saved. M. Claes's hands will be tied for the future; your landed property is inalienable; he will be unable to borrow any more money on his own, which will be mortgaged beyond their value, and the whole arrangement will be a family affair; there will be no lawsuits and no scandal. Your father will perforce set about his investigations less recklessly, if, indeed, he does not give them up altogether."

"Yes," said Marguerite, "but how shall we live? There will be no interest paid on the hundred thousand francs secured to us on this house so long as we continue to live in it. The farms in the plains of Orchies will bring in just enough to pay interest on the mortgages. What shall we do?"

"Well, in the first place," said Emmanuel, "if you invest Gabriel's remaining fifty thousand francs in the Funds, at present prices it will bring in four thousand livres; that will be sufficient to pay all his expenses at the Ecole in Paris. Gabriel cannot touch the principal nor the money secured to him on this house until he comes of age, so you need not fear that he will squander a penny of it, and you will have one expense the less. In the second place, is there not your own share, a hundred and fifty thousand francs?"

"My father will be sure to ask me for them," she cried in dismay, "and I could not refuse him."

"Well, then, dear Maguerite, you can secure the money by robbing yourself. Invest it in the Funds in your brother's name; it would bring you in twelve or thirteen thousand livres, and you could manage to live on that. An emancipated minor cannot touch his principal without the consent of the family council, so you will gain three years of freedom from anxiety. In three years' time your father will either have solved his problem, or, as is more probable, he

will have given it up as hopeless; and when Gabriel comes of age he can transfer the stock into your name, and the accounts can be finally settled among the four of you."

Marguerite asked for an explanation of the provisions of the law which she could not understand at first, and again they went over every point. It was certainly a novel situation—two lovers poring over a copy of the Code, which Emmanuel had brought with him in order to make the position of minors clear to Marguerite. Love's penetration came to the aid of her woman's quick-wittedness, and she soon grasped the gist of the matter.

The next day Gabriel returned home. M. de Solis came also, and from him Balthazar heard the news of his son's admission to the Ecole polytechnique. Claes expressed his acknowledgments by a wave of the hand. "I am very glad to hear it," he said; "so Gabriel is to be a scientific man, is he?" and the head of the house returned to his laboratory.

"Gabriel," said Marguerite, as Balthazar went, "you must work hard, and you must not be extravagant. Do as others do, but be very careful; and while you are in Paris spend your holidays with our friends and relations there, and do not contract the expensive habits which ruin young men. Your necessary expenses will amount to nearly a thousand crowns, so you will have a thousand francs left for pocket money. That should be enough."

"I will answer for him," said Emmanuel de Solis, laying his hand on his pupil's shoulder.

A month later M. de Conyncks and Marguerite had obtained all the required guarantee from M. Claes. Emmanuel's prudent advice had been approved and carried out to the letter. Balthazar felt ashamed of the sale of the forest. His creditors had harassed him, until he had been driven to take this rash step to escape from them; and now, when he was confronted with the consequences of his deeds, when he was face to face, moreover, with his stern cousin, who was inflexible where honor was con-

cerned, he did all that was required of him. He was, in fact, not ill pleased to repair so easily the mischief he had half unconsciously wrought. He put his signature to the various papers laid before him with the preoccupied air of a man for whom science was the one reality and all things else of no moment. He had no more foresight than the negro who sells his wife in the morning for a drop of brandy, and sheds tears over her loss in the evening. Apparently he could not look forward: even the immediate future was beyond his ken; he never stopped to ask himself what must happen when his last ducat had been thrown into the furnace, and prosecuted his researches as recklessly as before. He neither knew nor cared to know that the house in which he lived was his only in name, and, like his estates, had passed into other hands; he did not realize the fact that (thanks to the stringent regulations of the law) he could not raise another penny on the property of which he was in a manner the legal guardian.

The year 1818 went by, and no untoward event occurred, The two girls just managed to defray the necessary expenses of the housekeeping and of Jean's education with the interest of the money invested in Gabriel's name, which he punctually rémitted every quarter. M. de Solis lost his uncle in the December of that year.

One morning Marguerite heard from Martha that her father had sold his collection of tulips, the furniture of the state apartments, and all their remaining plate. She was compelled to repurchase the necessary silver for daily use herself, and to have it marked with her own initials. Hitherto she had watched Balthazar's depredations in silence; but after dinner that evening she asked Félicie to leave her alone with her father, and when he had seated himself by the fireside as usual, Marguerite spoke.

"You are the master here, dear father," she said; "you can sell everything, even your children. We will all obey you without a murmur; but I must point out to you that we have no money left, that we have scarcely enough to

live upon this year, and that Félicie and I have to work night and day to earn the money to pay for Jean's school expenses by the lace dress which we are making. Father dear, give up your researches, I implore you."

"You are right, dear child; in six weeks they will come to an end. I shall have discovered the Absolute, or the Absolute will be proved to be undiscoverable. You will have millions—"

"But leave us bread to eat meanwhile," pleaded Marguerite.

"Bread? Is there no bread in the house?" said Claes in blank dismay. "No bread in the house of a Claes! What has become of all our property?"

"You have cut down the forest of Waignies. The ground has not been cleared as yet, so it brings in nothing, and the rents of the farms at Orchies are not sufficient to pay interest on the mortgages."

"Then how do we live?" he asked.

Marguerite held up her needle.

"The interest on Gabriel's money helps us," she added, "but it is not enough. I shall just make both ends meet at the end of the year if you do not overwhelm me with bills that I did not expect, for you say nothing about your purchases. I feel quite sure that I have enough to meet my quarterly expenses, it is all planned out so carefully—and then a bill is sent in for soda or potash, or zinc or sulphur, and all sorts of things."

"Have patience and wait another six weeks, dear child, and then I will be very prudent. You shall see wonders, my little Marguerite."

"It is quite time to think of your own affairs. You have sold everything; pictures, tulips, silver-plate—nothing is left to us; but at any rate you will not run into debt again?"

"I am determined to make no more debts."

"No more debts!" she cried. "Then there are debts?"

"Oh! nothing, nothing, mere trifles," he said, reddening, as he lowered his eyes.

For the first time in her life Marguerite felt humiliated by her father's humiliation; it was so painful to her that she could not bring herself to inquire into the matter; but a month later a messenger came from a Douai bank with a bill of exchange for ten thousand francs, which bore Claes's signature. When Marguerite asked for a day's delay, and expressed her regret that she had not received any notice and so was unprepared to meet the bill, the messenger informed her that Messieurs Protez and Chiffreville held nine others, each for a like amount, which would fall due in consecutive months.

"It is all over with us!" cried Marguerite, "the time has come."

She sent for her father, and walked restlessly up and down the parlor speaking to herself, "A hundred thousand francs, or our father must go to prison! . . . What shall I do? Oh! what shall I do?"

Balthazar did not come. Marguerite grew tired of waiting, and went up to the laboratory. She paused in the doorway, and saw her father standing in a brilliant patch of sunlight in the middle of a vast room filled with machinery and dusty glass vessels; the tables that stood here and there were loaded with books and numbered and ticketed specimens of various substances; yet other specimens were heaped on the shelves, along the walls, or flung down beside the furnaces. There was something repugnant to orderly Flemish prejudices in all this confused litter. Balthazar's tall figure rose above a collection of flasks and retorts; he had thrown off his coat and rolled back his sleeves above the elbows like a workman, his shirt was unfastened, exposing his chest, covered with white hair. He was gazing with frightful intentness on an air pump, from which he never took his eyes. The receiver of the instrument was covered by a lens constructed of two convex glasses, the space between them being filled with alcohol; the sunlight that entered the room through one of the panes of the rose window (the rest had been carefully blocked up) was

thus focused on the contents of the receiver. The plate of the receiver was insulated, and communicated with the wire of a huge voltaic battery. Lemulquinier was busy at the moment in shifting the plate of the receiver, so that the lens might be maintained in a position perpendicular to the rays of the sun; he raised his face, which was black with dust, and shouted, "Ah! mademoiselle, keep away!"

She looked at her father, who knelt on one knee before his apparatus, perfectly indifferent to the rays of sunlight that shone full on his face and lighted up his hair till it gleamed like silver; his brows were knotted, every muscle of his face was tense with painful expectation. The strange things strewn around him, the mysterious machinery dimly visible in the semi-darkness of the rest of the attic, everything about her combined to alarm Marguerite.

"Our father is mad," she said to herself in her dismay.

Then she went up to him and whispered in his ear, "Send away Lemulquinier."

"No, no, child, I want him; I am waiting to see the result of an experiment which has never been tried before. For the last three days we have been on the watch for a ray of sunlight; everything is ready, I am about to concentrate the solar rays on these metals in a perfect vacuum, submitting them simultaneously to the action of a current of electricity. In another moment, you see, I shall employ the most powerful agents known to chemistry, and I alone—"

"Oh, father! instead of reducing metal to gas, you should keep it to pay your bills of exchange—"

"Wait! wait!"

"But M. Mersktus is here, father; he must have ten thousand francs by four o'clock."

"Yes, yes, presently. It is quite right; I did sign a bill for some small amount which would fall due this month. I thought I should have discovered the Absolute before this. Good heavens! if only I had a July sun, the experiment would be over by this time."

He ran his fingers through his hair, the tears came into his eyes, and he dropped into an old cane-seated chair.

"That is quite right, sir," said Lemulquinier. "It is all the fault of that rascally sun that won't shine enough, the lazy beggar."

Neither master nor man seemed to remember Marguerite's presence.

"Leave us, Mulquinier," she said.

"Ah!" cried Claes, "I have it! We will try a new experiment."

"Father, never mind the experiments now," said the young girl when they were alone. "Here is a demand for a hundred thousand francs, and we have not a farthing. Your honor is involved; you must come down and leave the laboratory. What will become of you if you are imprisoned? Shall your white hair and the name of Claes be soiled with the disgrace of bankruptcy? It shall not be, I will not have it, I will find strength to combat your madness; it would be dreadful to see you wanting bread in your old age. Open your eyes to our position; come to your senses at last!"

"Madness!" cried Balthazar, rising to his feet. A light shone in the eyes he fixed on his daughter's face, "*Madness!*" There was something so majestic in his manner as he repeated the word that his daughter trembled. He folded his arms. "Ah! your mother would never have uttered that word," he went on. "She did not shut her eyes to the importance of my researches; she studied science that she might understand me; she saw that I was working for humanity, that there was nothing selfish nor sordid in me. I see that a wife's love rises far above a daughter's affection; yes, love is the loftiest of all feelings. Come to my senses!" he went on, striking his breast. "When did I take leave of them? Am I not myself? We are poor, are we? Very well, my daughter, I choose to be poor; do you understand? I am your father, and you must obey me. You shall be rich again when I wish it. As for your fortune, it is a mere

nothing. When I find a solvent of carbon, I will fill the parlor downstairs with diamonds, but even that is a pitiful trifle compared with the wonders for which I am seeking. Surely you can wait when I am doing my utmost, and spending my life in superhuman efforts to—"

"Father, I have no right to ask an account of the four millions which have melted away in this garret. I will say nothing of my mother, but your science killed her. If I were married, I should no doubt love my husband as my mother loved you; I would sacrifice everything for him, just as my mother sacrificed everything for you. I am doing as she bade me, I have given you all I had to give; you have had proof of it, I would not marry lest you should be compelled to render an account of your guardianship. But let us say no more about the past, let us think of the present. You have brought things to a crisis, and I have come here to put it before you. We must have money to meet these bills; do you understand me? There is absolutely nothing left but the portrait of our ancestor Van Claes. I have come in my mother's name; my mother, whose heart failed her when she had to struggle for her children's sake against their father's will, bade me resist you; I have come in my brothers' name and my sister's; father, I have come in the name of all the Claes to bid you cease your experiments, and to retrieve your losses before you turn to chemistry again. If you steel yourself against me, if you use your authority over us only to kill us—your ancestors, and your own honor plead for me, and what can chemistry urge against the voices of your family? I have been your daughter but too well."

"And now you mean to be my executioner," he said in a feeble voice.

Marguerite turned and fled. She could not trust herself to play her part any longer; her mother's voice rang in her ears, "*Love your father, and do not cross him—more than you can help!*"

"Here is a pretty piece of work of mademoiselle's," said

Lemulquinier, as he came down into the kitchen for his breakfast. "We had just about put our finger on the Secret; we only wanted a blink of July sunlight, and the master—ah! what a man that is! he stands in the shoes of Providence, as you may say. There was not *that*," he said to Josette, clicking his thumb nail against his front teeth, "between us and the secret, when, presto! up she comes and makes a fuss about some nonsensical bills—"

"Good, then," cried Martha, "pay them yourself out of your wages!"

"Am I to eat dry bread? Where is the butter?" demanded Lemulquinier, turning to Josette.

"And where is the money to buy it with?" the cook answered tartly. "What, you old villain, if you can make gold in your devil's kitchen, why don't you make butter? It is not near so hard to make, and it would fetch something in the market, and go some way toward making the pot boil. All the rest of us are eating dry bread. The young ladies are living on dry bread and walnuts, and you want to be better fed than your betters? Mademoiselle has only a hundred francs a month to spend for the whole household; there is only one dinner for us all. If you want luxuries, you have your furnaces upstairs, where you fritter away pearls, till they talk of nothing else all over the town. Just look for your roast fowls up there!"

Lemulquinier took up his bread and left the kitchen.

"He will buy something with his own money," said Martha; "all the better, it is so much saved. Isn't he a stingy old heathen?"

"We must starve him, that is the only way," said Josette. "He has not waxed a single floor this week, that he hasn't; he is always up above, and I am doing his work; he may just as well pay me for it by treating us to a few herrings: if he brings any home I shall look after them."

"Ah!" said Martha, "there is Mlle. Marguerite crying. Her old wizard of a father would gobble down the house without saying grace. In my country they would have

burned him alive for a sorcerer long before this; but they have no more religion here than Moorish infidels."

In spite of herself, Mlle. Claes was sobbing as she came through the gallery. She reached her room, sought for her mother's letter, and read as follows:

"My Child—If God so wills, my spirit will be with you as you read these lines, the last that I shall ever write; they are full of love for my dear little ones, left to the mercy of a fiend who was too strong for me, a fiend who will have devoured your last morsel of bread, as he gnawed my life and my love! You knew, my darling, if I loved your father, and my love for him is failing now as I die, for I am taking precautions against him: I am doing that which I cannot bring myself to confess in my lifetime. Yes, in the depths of my grave I treasure a last resource for you, until the day comes when you will know the last extremity of misfortune. If he has brought you to absolute want, my child; if the honor of our house is at stake, you must ask M. de Solis, if he is still living, or if not, his nephew, our good Emmanuel, for a hundred and seventy thousand francs, which are yours, and which will enable you to live. And if at last you find that nothing can check this passion, if the thought of his children's welfare proves no stronger a restraint than did a regard for my happiness, and he should wrong you still further, then leave your father, for your lives at any rate must not be sacrificed to his. I could not desert him; my place was at his side. It rests with you, Marguerite, to save the family; you must protect Gabriel, Jean, and Félicie at all costs. Take courage, be the guardian angel of the Claes; and you must be firm, Marguerite, I dare not say be ruthless; but if the evil that has been ready wrought is to be even partially repaired, you must save something, you must think of yourself as being on the brink of dire poverty, for nothing can stem the course of the passion which took all I had in the world from me. So, my child, out of the fulness of affection you must refuse to

listen to the promptings of affection; you may have to deceive your father, but the deceptions will be a glory to you, there will be hard things to say and do, and you will feel guilty, but they will be heroic deeds if they are done to protect your defenceless brothers and sister. Our good and upright M. de Solis assured me of this, and never was there a clearer and more scrupulous conscience than his. I could never have brought myself to speak the words I have written, not even at the point of death. And yet—be tender and reverent in this hideous struggle; soften your refusals, and resist him on your knees. Not even death will have put an end to my sorrow and my tears. . . . Kiss my dear children for me now that you are to become their sole guardian, and may God and all the saints be with you.

"JOSEPHINE."

A receipt was inclosed from the Messieurs de Solis, uncle and nephew, for the amount deposited in their hands by Mme. Claes, which they undertook to refund to her children if her family should present the document.

Marguerite called the old duenna, and Martha hurried upstairs to her mistress, who bade her go to ask M. Emmanuel de Solis to come to the Maison Claes.

"How noble and honorable he is!" she thought; "he never breathed a word of this to me, and he has made all my troubles and difficulties his."

Emmanuel came before Martha had returned from her errand.

"You have kept a secret which concerned me," she said, as she held out the paper.

Emmanuel bent his head.

"Marguerite, this means that you are in great distress?" he asked, and tears came to his eyes.

"Ah! yes. You will help me, you whom my mother calls 'our good Emmanuel,'" she said, as she gave him the letter; and, in spite of her trouble, she felt a sudden thrill of joy that her mother approved her choice.

"I have been ready to live or die for you ever since I saw you in the picture gallery," he answered, with tears of happiness and sorrow in his eyes; "but I did not know, and I waited, I did not even dare to hope that one day you would let me die for you. If you really know me, you know that my word is sacred, so you must forgive me for keeping my word to your mother; I could only obey her wishes to the letter, I had no right to exercise my own judgment—"

"You have saved us!" she broke in, as she took his arm, and they went down together to the parlor.

When Marguerite had learned the history of the trust fund she told him the whole miserable story of the straits to which they were reduced.

"We must meet the bills at once," said Emmanuel; "if they have been deposited with Mersktus, you will save interest on them. Then I will send you the remaining seventy thousand francs. My poor uncle left me that amount in gold ducats, so it will be easy to bring them here, and no one will know about it."

"Yes," she said, "bring them at night; our father will be asleep, and we can hide them somewhere. If he knew that I had any money he might take it from me by force. Oh! Emmanuel, to be suspicious of one's own father!" she said, and burst into tears as she leaned her forehead against his breast.

It was in this piteous and gracious entreaty for protection that Marguerite's love spoke for the first time; love had been surrounded from its first beginnings by sorrow, and had grown familiar with pain, but her heart was too full, and at this last trouble it overflowed.

"What is to be done? What will become of us? He sees nothing of all this; he has not a thought for us nor for himself, for I cannot think how he can live in the garret; it is like a furnace."

"But what can you expect of a man who at every moment of his life cries, like Richard III., 'My kingdom for a horse'?" answered Emmanuel. "He will be inexorable,

and you must be equally unyielding. You can pay his bills, and let him have your fortune if you will, but your brothers' and sister's money is neither yours nor his."

"Let him have my fortune!" she repeated, grasping Emmanuel's hand in hers, and looking at him with sparkling eyes. "This is *your* advice to me? And Pierquin told me lies without end, for fear I should part with it."

"Alas!" he said, "perhaps I too am selfish after my own fashion. Sometimes I would have you without a penny, for it seems to me that so you would be nearer to me; sometimes I would have you rich and happy, and then I feel how poor and petty it is to think that the empty pomp of wealth could keep us apart."

"Dear! let us talk no more about ourselves—"

"Ourselves!" he exclaimed in ecstasy; then after a moment he went on, "The evil is great no doubt, but it is not irreparable."

"It lies with us to repair it; the family has no longer a head. He has utterly forgotten all that he owes to himself and his children, and has lost all sense of right and wrong—for he who was so high-minded, so generous, and so upright, who should have been his children's protector, has squandered their property in defiance of the law. To what depths he must have fallen! Good God! what can he think to find?"

"Unluckily, dear Marguerite, however culpable he may be as the head of a family, he is quite right from a scientific point of view to act as he does. Some score of men perhaps in all Europe are capable of understanding him and admire him, though every one else says that he is mad. Still, you are perfectly justified in refusing to surrender the children's money. There is an element of chance in every great discovery. If your father still persists in working out his problem, he will discover the solution without this reckless expenditure, and very possibly just at the moment when he gives it up as hopeless."

"It is well for my poor mother that she died!" said

Marguerite. "She would have suffered a martyrdom a thousand times worse than death. The first shock of her collision with science killed her, and there seems to be no end to the struggle—"

"There will be an end to it," said Emmanuel, "when you have absolutely nothing left. There will be an end to M. Claes's credit, and then he will be forced to stop."

"Then he may as well stop at once," said Marguerite, "for we have nothing left."

M. de Solis bought up the bills and gave them to Marguerite. Balthazar came down to dinner a few minutes earlier than usual. For the first time in two years his daughter saw traces of emotion on his face, and his distress was painful to see. He was once more a father; reason had put science to flight. He gave a glance into the courtyard, and then into the garden; and when he was sure that they were alone, he turned to his daughter with sadness and kindness in his face.

"Dear child," he said, taking her hand and pressing it with earnest tenderness, "forgive your old father. Yes, Marguerite, I was in the wrong, and you were altogether right. I have not discovered the Secret, so there is no excuse for me. I will go away from here. I cannot look on and see Van Claes sold," he went on, and his eyes turned to the martyr's portrait. "He died for the cause of freedom, and I shall die for science; he is revered, I am hated—"

"Hated, father? Oh! no," she cried, throwing her arms about him; "we all adore you, do we not, Félicie?" she asked of her sister, who came into the room at that moment.

"What is it, father dear?" asked the little girl, slipping her hand into his.

"I have ruined you all. . . ."

"Eh!" cried Félicie, "the boys will make a fortune for us. Jean is always at the head of his class."

"Wait a moment, dear father," Marguerite added, and with a charming caressing gesture the daughter led her father to the chimney-piece, and drew several papers from

beneath the clock; "here are your drafts, but you must not sign your name to any more bills, for there will be nothing left to pay them with another time—"

"Then you have some money?" Balthazar said in his daughter's ear, as soon as he had recovered from his surprise; and with all her heroism, Marguerite's heart sank at the words. There was such frenzy of joy, and hope, and expectation in her father's face: his eyes were wandering round the room as if in search of the money.

"Yes, father," she said sadly, "I have my fortune."

"Give it to me!" he cried, with an eagerness which he could not control; "I will give you back a hundred-fold."

"Yes, I will give it to you," said Marguerite, looking at her father, who did not understand the meaning that lay beneath his daughter's words.

"Ah! my dear child," he said, "you have saved my life! I had thought out a final experiment, the one thing that remains to be tried. If I do not succeed this time, I must renounce the Quest of the Absolute altogether. Come here, darling, give me your arm; if I can compass it, you shall be the happiest woman in the world; you have given me fresh hopes of happiness and fame; you have given me power; I will heap riches upon you, and wealth, and jewels."

He clasped both her hands in his and kissed her forehead, giving expression to his joy in caresses that seemed almost like abject gratitude to Marguerite. Balthazar had no eyes for any one else during the dinner; he watched her with something like a lover's fondness and alert attention; she could not move but he tried to read her thoughts and to guess her wishes, and waited on her with an assiduity which embarrassed her; there was a youthfulness in his manner which contrasted strangely with his premature old age. But in reply to his caresses and attentions, Marguerite could only draw his attention to their present distress, either by giving expression to her doubts, or by a glance at the empty tiers of shelves along the walls.

"Pshaw!" he said, "in six months' time we will fill them

with gold plate and wonders. You shall live like a queen in state. All the earth will be under our feet; everything will be ours. And all through you, my Marguerite. . . . Margarita!" he mused smilingly, "the name was prophetic. Marguerite means a pearl. Sterne said that somewhere or other. Have you read Sterne? Would you care to read Sterne? It would amuse you."

"They say that pearls are a result of some disease," she said bitterly, "and we have already suffered much."

"Do not be sad; you will make the fortune of those you love; you will be rich and great—"

"Mademoiselle has such a good heart," said Lemulquinier, and his colander countenance was distorted by a smile.

The rest of the evening Balthazar spent with his daughters, and for them exerted all his powers of conversation and the charm of his personality. There was something magnetic in his looks and tones, a fascination like that of the serpent; the genius and the kindly wit that had attracted Josephine were called into play; he seemed, as it were, to take his daughters to his heart. When Emmanuel de Solis came, he found a family group; the father and children were talking as they had not done for a long time. In spite of himself, the young headmaster fell under the spell of the scene; it was impossible to resist Balthazar's manner, de Solis was carried away by it. Men of science, however deeply absorbed in watching quite other phenomena, bring highly trained powers of perception to the least details of daily life. Nothing escapes their observation in their own sphere; they are not oblivious, but they keep to their own times and seasons, and are seldom in touch with the world that lies beyond that sphere; they know everything, and forthwith forget it all; they make forecasts of the future for their own sole benefit, foresee the events that take others by surprise, and keep their own counsel. If, while to all appearance they are unconscious of what is passing, they make use of their special gift of observation and deduction, they see and understand, and draw their own inferences, and there is an end of it;

work claims them again, and they seldom make any but a blundering use of their knowledge of the things of life. At times when they are roused from their social apathy, or if they happen to drop from the world of ideas to the world of men and women, they bring with them a well-stored memory, and are by no means strangers to what is happening there. So it was with Balthazar. He had quick sympathies as well as keen-sightedness, and knew the whole of his daughter's life; he had guessed or learned in some way the almost imperceptible events of the course of the mysterious love that bound her to Emmanuel; he let the lovers feel that he had guessed their secret, and sanctioned their affection by sharing in it. From Marguerite's father this was the sweetest form of flattery, and they could not resist it. The evening thus spent was delightful after the troubled and anxious life the poor girls had led of late. When Balthazar at last left them, after they had basked, as it were, for a while in the sunlight of his presence, and bathed in his tenderness, Emmanuel de Solis's constrained manner changed; he emptied his pockets of three thousand ducats, of which he had been uneasily conscious. He set them down on Marguerite's work-table, and she covered them with some house-linen which she was mending. Then he went back for the remainder. When he returned, Félicie had gone to bed. It was past eleven o'clock, and Martha, who was sitting up for her mistress, was still busy in Félicie's room.

"Where shall I hide it?" asked Marguerite; she could not resist the temptation of passing the coins through her fingers, a childish freak, a moment's delay, which cost her dear!

"Those pedestals are hollow," said Emmanuel; "I will raise the column off its base, and we will slip the gold inside it: no one would think of looking there for it."

But just as Marguerite was making the last journey but one between the work-table and the pedestal, she gave a shrill cry and let the piles of ducats fall, the paper in which they were wrapped gave way, and the gold coins rolled in all

directions over the floor; her father was standing in the doorway: his eager look terrified her.

"What ever are you doing?" he asked, looking from his daughter, who stood transfixed with terror, to the startled de Solis, who had hastily risen to his feet—too late, his kneeling position at the foot of the pedestal had been sufficient to betray him.

The din of the falling gold rang hideously in their ears; the coins lay scattered abroad on the floor, a sinister augury of the future.

"I thought so," said Balthazar; "I felt sure that I heard the rattle of gold . . ."

He was almost as excited as the other two; one thought possessed them both, and made their hearts beat so violently that the sounds could be heard in the great silence which suddenly fell in the parlor.

"Thank you, M. de Solis," said Marguerite, with a glance of intelligence, which said: "Play your part; help me to save the money."

"What!" cried Balthazar, with a clairvoyant glance at his daughter and Emmanuel, "then this gold—?"

"Belongs to this gentleman, who has been so good as to loan it to me that we may fulfil our engagements," she answered.

M. de Solis reddened, and turned as if to go.

"Monsieur," said Balthazar, laying a hand on his arm, "do not slip away from my grateful thanks."

"You owe me no thanks, M. Claes. The money belongs to Mlle. Marguerite; she has borrowed it of me on security," he answered, looking at Marguerite, who thanked him by an almost imperceptible movement of her eyelids.

"I cannot allow that," said Claes, taking up a pen and a sheet of paper from the table where Félicie had been writing. He turned to the two bewildered young people.

"How much is there?" he asked.

Balthazar's ruling passion had made him craftier than the most cunning of deliberate scoundrels; he meant to have the

money in his own hands. Marguerite and Emmanuel de Solis hesitated.

"Let us count it," said Balthazar.

"There are six thousand ducats," Emmanuel said.

"Seventy thousand francs," returned Claes.

Marguerite and Emmanuel exchanged glances, and Emmanuel took courage.

"M. Claes," he said respectfully, "your note of hand is worth nothing—pardon the technical expression. This morning I loaned mademoiselle a hundred thousand francs to buy up the bills which you were unable to meet, so evidently you are not in a position to give me any security. This money belongs to your daughter, who can dispose of it as seems good to her; but I have only loaned it with the understanding that she will sign a document giving me a claim on her share of the land at Waignies, on which the forest once stood."

Marguerite turned her head away to hide the tears that filled her eyes. She knew Emmanuel's purity of heart. He had been brought up by his uncle in the most scrupulous practice of the virtues prescribed by religion; she knew that he held lies in special abhorrence; he had laid his life and his heart at her feet, and now he was sacrificing his conscience for her.

"Good-night, M. de Solis," said Balthazar; "I had not looked for suspicion in one whom I regard almost with a father's eyes."

Emmanuel gave Marguerite a piteous glance, and then crossed the courtyard with Martha, who closed and bolted the house door after the visitor had gone.

As soon as the father and daughter were alone together, Claes said—"You love him, do you not?"

"Father, let us go straight to the point," she said. "You want this money? You shall never have any of it," and she began to gather up the scattered ducats, her father helping her in silence. Together they counted it over, Marguerite showing not a trace of distrust. When the gold was once

more arranged in piles, Claes spoke in the tone of a desperate man—"Marguerite, I must have the gold!"

"If you take it from me, it will be theft," she said coolly. "Listen to me, father; it would be far kinder to kill us outright than to make us daily endure a thousand deaths. You see, one of us must give way—"

"So you would murder your father?" he said.

"We shall have avenged our mother's death," she said, pointing to the spot where Mme. Claes had died.

"My child, if you only knew what is at stake, you would not say such things as these to me. Listen! I will explain what the problem is. . . . But you would not understand!" he cried in despair. "After all, give it to me; believe in your father for once. . . . Yes, I know that I gave your mother pain; I know that I have squandered (for that is how ignorant people put it) my own fortune and made great inroads into yours; I know that you are all working for what you call madness . . . but, my angel, my darling, my love, my Marguerite, just listen to me! If I do not succeed this time, I will put myself in your hands; all that you desire I will do; I will give to you the obedience that you owe to me; I will do your bidding, and administer my affairs as you shall direct; I will be my children's guardian no longer; I will lay down my authority. I swear it by your mother!" he said, shedding tears as he spoke.

Marguerite turned her head away; she could not bear to see his tears; and Claes, thinking that this was a sign of yielding, flung himself on his knees before her.

"Marguerite! Marguerite! give me the gold! Give it to me to save yourself from eternal remorse. What are twenty thousand francs? You see, I shall die; this will kill me. . . . Listen to me, Marguerite! My promise shall be religiously kept. I will give up my experiments if I fail; I will go away; I will leave Flanders, and even France, if you wish it. I will begin again as a mechanic, and build up my fortune *sou* by *sou*, so that my children may recover at last all that science will have taken from them."

Marguerite tried to persuade her father to rise, but he still knelt to her, and continued, with tears in his eyes—"Be tender and devoted this once; it is the last time. If I do not succeed I myself will acquiesce in your harsh judgment. You can call me a madman, a bad father; you can say that I am a fool, and I will kiss your hands; beat me if you will, I will bless you as the best of daughters, remembering that you have given me your very life-blood."

"Ah!" she cried, "if it were only my life-blood, you should have it; but how can I look on and see my brothers and sister murdered in cold blood for science? I cannot! Let it end!" she cried, drying her tears, and putting away her father's caressing hand from her.

"Seventy thousand francs and two months!" he said, rising in anger; "I want no more than that! and my daughter bars my way to fame, my daughter stands between wealth and me. My curse upon you!" he went on, after a moment's pause. "You have neither a daughter's nor a woman's heart! You will never be a wife nor a mother! . . . Let me have it! Say the word, my dear little one, my precious child. I will adore you!" and he stretched out his hand with horrible eagerness toward the gold.

"I cannot help myself if you take it by force, but God and the great Claes look down upon us now," said Marguerite, pointing to the portrait.

"Then live, if you can, when your father's blood will be on your head!" cried Balthazar, looking at her with abhorrence.

He rose, looked round the parlor, and slowly left it; when he reached the door, he turned and came back as a beggar might, with an imploring gesture, a look of entreaty, but Marguerite only shook her head in reply.

"Farewell, my daughter!" he said gently; "try to live happily."

When he had gone, Marguerite stood for a while in dull bewilderment; it seemed as if her whole world had slipped

from her. She was no longer in the familiar parlor; she was no longer conscious of her physical existence; her soul had taken wings and soared to a world where thought annihilates time and space, where the veil drawn across the future is lifted by some divine power. It seemed to her that she lived through whole days between each sound of her father's footsteps on the staircase; and when she heard him moving above in his room, a cold shudder went through her. A sudden warning vision flashed like lightning through her brain; she fled noiselessly up the dark staircase with the speed of an arrow, and saw her father pointing a pistol at his head.

"Take it all!" she cried, as she sprang toward him.

She fell into a chair. At the sight of her white face, Balthazar began to weep—such tears as old men shed; he was like a child; he kissed her forehead, speaking incoherent, meaningless words; he almost danced for joy, and tried to play with her as a lover plays with the mistress who has made him happy.

"Enough of this, father!" she said; "remember your promise! If you do not succeed, will you obey my wishes?"

"Yes."

"Oh, mother!" she cried, turning to the door of Mme. Claes's room, "you would have given it all to him, would you not?"

"Sleep in peace," said Balthazar; "you are a good girl."

"Sleep!" she cried; "the nights that brought sleep are gone with my youth. You have made me old, father, just as you gradually blighted my mother's life."

"Poor little one! If I could only give you confidence, by explaining the results I hope to obtain from a grand experiment that I have just planned, you would see then—"

"I see nothing but our ruin," she said, rising to go.

The next day was a holiday at the Collège de Douai. Emmanuel de Solis came with Jean to see them.

"Well?" he asked anxiously, as he went up to Marguerite.

"I gave way," she said.

"My dear life," he answered, half sorrowfully, half gladly, "if you had not yielded, I should have admired you, but I adore you for your weakness."

"Poor, poor Emmanuel! what remains for us?"

"Leave everything to me," he cried, with a radiant glance. "We love each other; it will be well with us."

Several months went by in unbroken peace. M. de Solis made Marguerite see that her retrenchments and petty economies were absolutely useless, and advised her to live comfortably, and to use the remainder of the money which Mme. Claes had deposited with him for the expenses of the household. All through those months Marguerite was harassed by the anxiety which had proved too heavy a burden for her mother; for, little as she was disposed to believe in her father's promises, she was driven to hope in his genius. It is a strange and inexplicable thing that we so often continue to hope when we have no faith left. Hope is the flower of Desire, and Faith is the fruit of Certainty.

"*If* my father succeeds, we shall be happy," Marguerite told herself; Claes and Lemulquinier said, "We shall succeed!" but Claes and Lemulquinier were alone in their belief. Unluckily, Balthazar grew more and more depressed day by day. Sometimes he did not dare to meet his daughter's eyes at dinner; sometimes, on the other hand, he looked at her in triumph. Marguerite spent her evenings in seeking explanations of legal difficulties, with young de Solis as her tutor; she was always asking her father about their complicated family relationships. At last her masculine education was complete; she was ready with plans to put into execution if her father should once more be worsted in the duel with his antagonist—the Unknown X.

About the beginning of July, Balthazar spent a whole day on a bench in the garden, absorbed in sad thoughts. Once and again he looked about him, at the bare garden beds, which had once been gay with tulips, at the windows

of his wife's room, and shuddered, doubtless at the recollection of all that this Quest had cost him. He stirred from time to time, and it was plain that he thought of other things than science. Just before dinner, Marguerite took up her needlework, and came out to sit beside him for a few minutes.

"Well, father, you have not succeeded?"

"No, my child."

"Ah!" Marguerite said gently, "I am not going to utter a word of reproach; indeed, we are both equally to blame; but I must claim the fulfilment of your promise; your promise is surely sacred—you are a Claes. Your children will never show you anything but love and respect; but from to-day you are in my hands, and must do as I wish. Do not be anxious; my rule will be mild, and I will do my best to bring it quickly to an end. I am going to leave you for a month—Martha is going with me—so that I may see after your affairs," she added, with a kiss, "for you are my child now, you know. So Félicie will be left in charge. Poor child! she is barely seventeen; how can she resist you? Be generous, and do not ask her for a penny, for she has nothing beyond what is strictly necessary for the housekeeping expenses. Take courage; give up your investigations and your theories for two or three years, your ideas will mature, and by that time I shall have saved the necessary money, and the problem shall be solved. Now, then, tell me, is not your queen a merciful sovereign?"

"So all is not yet lost?" the old man answered.

"No, if you will only keep your word."

"I will obey you, Marguerite," said Claes, deeply moved.

Next morning M. Conyncks came from Cambrai for his grandniece. He had come in his travelling carriage, and only stayed in his cousin's house until Marguerite and Martha could complete the preparations for their journey. M. Claes made his cousin welcome, but he was evidently downcast and humiliated. Old M. Conyncks guessed Balthazar's thoughts; and as they sat at breakfast, he said,

with clumsy frankness—"I have a few of your pictures, cousin; I have a liking for a good picture; it is a ruinous mania, but we all have our weaknesses—"

"Dear uncle!" remonstrated Marguerite.

"They say you are ruined, cousin; but a Claes always has treasures here," he said, tapping his forehead, "and here, too, has he not?" he added, laying his hand on his heart. "I believe in you, moreover, and having a few spare crowns in my purse, I am using them in your service."

"Ah!" cried Balthazar, "I will repay you with treasures."

"The only treasures we have in Flanders, cousin, are patience and hard work," said Conyncks sternly. "Our ancestor there has the two words graven on his forehead," he added, as he pointed to the portrait of Van Claes.

Marguerite kissed her father and bade him good-by, gave her last parting directions to Josette and Félicie, and set out for Paris with her great-uncle. He was a widower with one daughter, a girl of twelve, and the owner of an immense fortune; it was not impossible that he might think of marrying again, and the good people of Douai believed that Marguerite was destined to be his second wife. Rumors of this great match for Marguerite reached Pierquin's ears, and brought him back to the Maison Claes. Considerable changes had been wrought in the views of that wide-awake worthy.

Society in Douai had been divided for the past two years into two hostile camps. The noblesse formed one group, and the bourgeoisie the other; and, not unnaturally, the latter cordially hated the former. This sharp division, in fact, was not confined to Douai; it suddenly split France into two rival nations, small jealous squabbles assumed serious proportions and contributed not a little to the widespread acceptance of the Revolution of July, 1830. There was a third party occupying an intermediate position between the ultra-Monarchical and ultra-Liberal camps, to wit, the officials who belonged socially to one or other circle, but who, on the downfall of the Bourbons from power, immedi-

ately became neutral. At the outset of the struggle between the noblesse and the bourgeoisie the most unheard-of splendor was displayed at coffee-parties. The Royalists made such brilliantly successful efforts to eclipse their Liberal rivals that these epicurean festivities were said to have cost some enthusiastic politicians their lives; like ill-cast cannon, they could not stand such practice. Naturally the two circles became more and more restricted and fanatical.

Pierquin, though a very wealthy man as provincial fortunes go, found himself excluded from the aristocratic circle and driven back upon the bourgeoisie. His self-love had suffered considerably in the process; he had received rebuff upon rebuff; gradually the men with whom he had formerly rubbed shoulders dropped his acquaintance. He was forty years of age, the limit of time when a man who contemplates marriage can think of taking a young wife. The matches to which he might aspire were among the bourgeoisie, but his ambition looked longingly back toward the aristocratic world from which he had been thrust, and he cast about for a creditable alliance which should reinstate him there. The Claes family lived so much out of the world that they knew nothing of all these social changes. Claes, indeed, belonged by birth to the old aristocracy of the province, but it seemed not at all likely that, absorbed as he was by scientific interests, he would share in the recently introduced class prejudices. However poor she might be, a daughter of the house of Claes would bring with her the dower of gratified vanity, which is eagerly coveted by all parvenus.

Pierquin, therefore, renewed his visits to the Maison Claes. He had made up his mind to this marriage, and to attain his social ambitions at all costs. He bestowed his company on Balthazar and Félicie in Marguerite's absence, and discovered, rather late in the day, that he had a formidable rival in Emmanuel de Solis. Emmanuel's late uncle the Abbé had left his nephew no inconsiderable amount of property, it was said; and in the eyes of the notary, who looked at everything from an undisguisedly material stand-

point, Emmanuel in the character of his uncle's heir was a rival to be dreaded: Pierquin was more disquieted by Emmanuel's money than by his attractive personality. Wealth restored all its lustre to the name of de Solis. Gold and noble birth were twin glories that reflected splendor upon each other. The notary saw that the young headmaster treated Félicie as a sister, and he became jealous of this sincere affection. He tried to eclipse Emmanuel, mingling conventional phrases of gallantry with the small talk of the day, and the airs of a man of fashion with the dreamy, pensive melancholy which was not ill suited to his face. He had lost all his illusions, he said, and turned his eyes on Félicie as if to let her know that she, and she alone, could reconcile him with life. And Félicie, to whom compliments and flattery were a novelty, listened to the language which is always sweet to hear, even when it is insincere; she mistook his emptiness for depth; she had nothing to occupy her mind, and her cousin became the object of the vague sentiments that filled her heart. Possibly, though she herself was not conscious of the fact, she was jealous of the attentions which Emmanuel showed her sister, and she wished to be likewise some man's first thought. Pierquin soon saw that Félicie showed more attention to him than to Emmanuel, and this encouraged him to persist in his attempt, until he went further than he had intended. Emmanuel looked on, watching the beginning of this passion, simulated in the lawyer, artlessly sincere in Félicie, whose future was at stake. Whispered phrases were exchanged between the cousins when Emmanuel's back was turned, little colloquies, trifling deceptions, which gave to the stolen words and glances a treacherous sweetness that might give rise to innocent errors.

Pierquin hoped and intended to turn his intimacy with Félicie to his own account, and to discover Marguerite's reasons for taking the journey to Paris; he wanted to know whether there was any question of her marriage, and whether he must renounce his pretensions; but, in spite of his trans-

parent manœuvres, neither Balthazar nor Félicie could throw any light on the subject, for the very sufficient reason that they themselves knew nothing of Marguerite's plans; on her accession to power she seemed to have adopted the maxims of statecraft, and had kept her own counsel.

Balthazar's brooding melancholy and depression made the evenings tedious. Emmanuel had succeeded in persuading him to play at backgammon, but Balthazar's thoughts were elsewhere all the while; and, as a rule, the great chemist, with all his intellectual powers, seemed positively stupid. His expectations had come to nothing; his humiliation was great; he had squandered three fortunes; he was a penniless gambler; he was crushed beneath the ruins of his house, beneath the burden of hopes that were disappointed but not extinct. The man of genius, curbed by necessity, acquiescing in his own condemnation, was a tragic spectacle which would have touched the most unfeeling nature. Pierquin himself could not but feel an involuntary respect for this caged lion with the look of baffled power in the eyes which were calm by reason of despair, and faded from excess of light; there was a mute entreaty for charity in them which the lips did not dare to frame. Sometimes his face suddenly lighted up as he devised a new experiment; and then Balthazar's eyes would travel round the room to the spot where his wife had died, and tears like burning grains of sand would cross the arid pupils of his eyes, grown over-large with thought, and his head would drop on his breast. He had lifted the world like a Titan, and the world had rolled back heavily on his breast. This giant sorrow, controlled so manfully, had its effect on Pierquin and Emmanuel, who at times felt so much moved by it that they were ready to offer him a sum of money sufficient for another series of experiments—so infectious are the convictions of genius! Both young men began to understand how Mme. Claes and Marguerite could have flung millions into the abyss; but reflection checked the impulses of their hearts, and their goodwill manifested itself in attempts at

consolation which increased the anguish of the fallen and stricken Titan.

Claes never mentioned his oldest daughter, showed no uneasiness at her prolonged absence, and did not appear to notice her silence, for she wrote neither to him nor to Félicie. He seemed to be displeased if Solis or Pierquin asked him for news of her. Did he suspect that Marguerite was plotting against him? Did he feel himself lowered in his own eyes now that he had abdicated and made over his rights as a father to his child? Had he come to love her less because they had changed places? Perhaps all these things counted for something, and mingled with other and vaguer feelings which overclouded his soul; he chose to say nothing of Marguerite, as though she were in some sort in disgrace.

Great men, however great, known or unknown, lucky or unlucky in their endeavors, are still human, and have their weaknesses. Unluckily, too, they are condemned to suffer doubly, for their qualities as well as for their defects; and perhaps Balthazar was as yet unused to the pangs of a wounded vanity. The days, the evenings which all four spent together, were full of melancholy, and overshadowed by vague, uneasy apprehensions, while Marguerite was away. They were days like a barren waste; they were not utterly without consolations, a few flowers bloomed here and there for them to pluck, but the house seemed to be shrouded in gloom in the absence of the oldest daughter, who had come to be its life and hope and strength. In this way two months went by, and Balthazar patiently awaited his daughter's return.

Marguerite came back to Douai with her uncle, who did not immediately return to Cambrai. Doubtless he meant to give support to his niece in an impending crisis. Marguerite's return was the occasion of a small family rejoicing The notary and M. de Solis had been invited to dinner by Félicie and Balthazar; and when the travelling carriage stopped before the door of the house, all four appeared to

receive the travellers with great demonstrations of joy. Marguerite seemed glad to be at home in her father's house again; tears filled her eyes as she crossed the courtyard and went to the parlor. As she put her arms round her father's neck, other thoughts had mingled with the girl's kiss, and she blushed like a guilty wife who cannot dissemble; but when she saw Emmanuel, the troubled look died out of her eyes, the sight of him seemed to give her courage for the task she had secretly set herself. In spite of the cheerfulness on every face and the gayety of the talk at dinner, father and daughter studied each other with distrust and curiosity. Balthazar did not ask Marguerite a single question as to her stay in Paris; paternal dignity doubtless prevented him. Emmanuel de Solis was equally discreet; but Pierquin, who had so long been acquainted with all the secrets of the family, did not avoid the subject, and concealed his inquisitiveness under an assumption of geniality.

"Well, dear cousin," he said, "did you see Paris, and the theatres—?"

"I saw nothing of Paris," she answered; "I only went out when I was obliged to go. The days went by very tediously for me; I was longing to see Douai again."

"If I had not made a fuss, she would not have gone to the opera; and when she did, she found it tiresome!" said M. Conyncks.

None of them felt at their ease that evening, the smiles were constrained, a painful anxiety lurked beneath the forced gayety; it was a trying occasion. Marguerite and Balthazar were both tortured by doubts and fears, and the others seemed to feel this. As the evening went on the faces of the father and daughter betrayed their agitation more plainly; and though Marguerite did her best to smile, her nervous movements, her glances, the tones of her voice betrayed her. M. Conyncks and Emmanuel de Solis seemed to understand the noble girl's agitation, and to bid her take courage by expressive glances; and Balthazar, hurt at not being taken into confidence while steps were taken and mat-

ters decided which concerned him, gradually became more and more reserved, and at last sat silent among his children and friends. Shortly, no doubt, Marguerite would inform him of her decisions. For a great man and a father the situation was intolerable.

Balthazar had reached the time of life when things are usually freely discussed with the children of the family, when capacity for feeling is increased by wider experience of life; his face grew graver, more thoughtful and troubled as the time of his extinction as a citizen drew nearer.

A crisis in the family life was impending, a crisis of which some idea can only be given by a metaphor. The clouds that bore a thunderbolt in their midst had gathered and darkened the sky, while they laughed below in the fields; every one felt the heat and the coming storm, looked up at the heavens, and hurried on his way.

M. Conyncks was the first to go, Balthazar went with him to his room, and Pierquin and Emmanuel took their leave in his absence. Marguerite bade the notary a friendly good-night; she said nothing to Emmanuel, but she clasped his hand tightly, and the tears stood in her eyes as she looked at him. She sent Félicie away, and when Claes came back to the parlor she was sitting there alone.

"My kind father," she said in a tremulous voice, "I could not have brought myself to leave home but for the gravity of our position; but now, after agonies of hope and fear, and in spite of unheard-of difficulties, I have brought back with me some chance of salvation for us all. Thanks partly to your name, partly to our uncle's influence, and the interest of M. de Solis, we have obtained the post of Receiver of Taxes in Brittany for you; it is worth eighteen to twenty thousand francs a year, they say. Our uncle has undertaken to be security for you. Here is your appointment," she added, drawing a paper from her reticule. "For the next few years we must retrench and be content with bare necessaries; you would find it intolerable to live on here in the house; our father ought at least to live as he has always

been accustomed to live. I shall not ask you to spare any of your income for us; you will spend it as seems good to you. But I entreat you to remember that we have no income, not a penny except from the amount invested in the Funds for Gabriel—he always sends the interest to us. We will live as if the house were a convent; no one in the town shall hear anything about our economies. If you lived on here in Douai, you would be a positive hindrance to us in our efforts to restore comfort. Am I abusing the authority you gave to me when I put you in a position to re-establish your fortune yourself? In a few years' time, if you choose, you will be receiver-general."

"So, Marguerite," Balthazar said in a low voice, "you are driving me out of my house—"

"I did not deserve such a bitter reproach," said Marguerite, controlling the emotions that surged up in her heart. "You will come back again among us as soon as you can live in your native town in a manner befitting your name. Besides, did you not give me your promise, father?" she went on coldly. "You must do what I ask of you. Our uncle is waiting to go with you to Brittany, so that you may not have to travel alone."

"I shall not go!" cried Balthazar, rising to his feet; "I stand in need of no one's assistance to re-establish my fortune and to pay all that is owing to my children."

"You had better go," said Marguerite, with no sign of agitation in her manner. "I ask you simply to think over our respective positions. I can put the case before you in a very few words; if you stay in the house, your children will go out of it, that you may be the master."

"Marguerite!" cried Balthazar.

"And the next thing to do," she went on, without heeding her father's anger, "will be to inform the minister of your refusal to accept a lucrative and honorable post. We should never have obtained it, in spite of interest and influence, if our uncle had not adroitly slipped several notes for a thousand francs into a certain lady's glove—"

"All of you will leave me!"

"Yes. If you do not leave us, we must leave you," she answered. "If I were your only child, I would follow my mother's example; I would not murmur at my fate, whatever you might bring upon me. But my brothers and sister shall not die of hunger and despair under your eyes; I promised this to her who died there," she said, pointing to her mother's bed. "We have hidden our troubles from you, and endured them in silence, but our strength fails us now. We are not on the brink of a precipice; we are in its lowest depths, father! And if we are to extricate ourselves, we want something besides courage; all our efforts must not be continually thwarted by the freaks of a passion—"

"My dear children!" cried Balthazar, seizing Marguerite's hand, "I will help you; I will work with you; I—"

"This is the way," she answered, holding out the minister's letter.

"But, my darling, it would take too long to restore my fortune in this way that you are pointing out to me. The results of ten years of work will be lost, as well as the enormous sums of money which the laboratory represents. Our resources are up there," he said, indicating the garret.

Marguerite went toward the door, saying, "Choose for yourself, father!"

"Ah! my daughter, you are very hard!" he answered, as he sat down in an armchair; but he let her go.

Next morning Marguerite learned from Lemulquinier that M. Claes had gone out. She turned pale at this simple announcement, and her face spoke so eloquently of cruel anxiety that the old servant said, "Do not alarm yourself, mademoiselle; the master said he would come back again at eleven o'clock to breakfast. He never went to bed at all last night. At two o'clock this morning he was standing by one of the windows in the parlor looking out at the roof of the laboratory. I was sitting up, waiting in the kitchen; I saw him, he was crying, he is in trouble; and here is the famous

month of July again, when the sun has power enough to make us all rich, and if you only—"

"That is enough!" said Marguerite. She knew now what the thoughts were that had harassed her father.

As a matter of fact, it had come to pass with Balthazar, as with all home-keeping people, that his life was inseparable, as it were, from the places which had become a part of it. His thoughts were wedded to his house and laboratory; he did not know how to do without the familiar surroundings; he was like a speculator who is at a loss to know what to do with himself on public holidays when he cannot go on 'Change. All his hopes dwelt there in his laboratory; it was the one spot under heaven where he could breathe vital air. This clinging to familiar things and places, so strong an instinct in weak natures, becomes almost tyrannous in men of science and learning. Balthazar Claes was to leave his house; for him this meant that he must renounce his science and his problem, or, in other words, that he must die.

Marguerite was in the last extremity of anxiety and fear until breakfast time. The thought of Balthazar's attempt to take his life after a similar scene came to her memory, and she feared that her father had found a tragic solution of his difficulties; she walked up and down in the parlor, and shuddered every time the bell rang at the door. Balthazar at last came back. Marguerite watched him cross the court, and, gazing anxiously at his face, could read nothing but the traces of all that storm of grief in its expression. When he came into the parlor she went up to him to wish him good-morning; he put his arms affectionately about her waist, drew her to his breast, kissed her forehead, and said in her ear—"I have been to see about my passport."

The tones of her father's voice, his resignation, his caress almost broke poor Marguerite's heart; she turned her head away to hide the tears which she could not keep back, fled into the garden, and only came back when she had wept at her ease. During breakfast Balthazar was in great spirits, like a man who has decided on his course.

"So we are to start for Brittany, uncle, are we?" he said to M. Conyncks. "I have always thought I should like to see Brittany."

"Living is cheap there," the old uncle remarked.

"Is father going to leave us?" cried Félicie.

M. de Solis came in with Jean at that moment.

"You will let him spend the day with us," said Balthazar, as Jean came to sit beside him; "I am going away to-morrow, and I want to bid him good-by."

Emmanuel looked across at Marguerite, who hung her head. It was a melancholy day; every one felt sad; every one tried not to give way to painful thoughts or to tears. This was no ordinary parting; it was an exile. And then, ever one instinctively felt how humiliating it was for a father thus to proclaim his losses by leaving his family and accepting the post of a paid official at Balthazar's time of life; but he was as magnanimous as Marguerite was firm, and submitted with dignity to the penance imposed on him for the errors which he had committed when carried away by his genius. When the evening was over, and the father and daughter were alone, Balthazar held out his hand to Marguerite. He had been as gentle and affectionate all through the day as in the happiest days of the past; and with a strange tenderness, in which despair was mingled, he asked, "Are you satisfied with your father?"

"You are worthy of *him!*" answered Marguerite, turning to the portrait of Van Claes.

Next morning Balthazar, followed by Lemulquinier, went into his laboratory to take leave of his cherished hopes. Master and man exchanged melancholy glances as they stood on the threshold of the garret. Everything was in working order, as though those hopes had not yet perished, and they were about to leave it all, perhaps forever. Balthazar looked round at the apparatus about which his thoughts had hovered for so long; there was nothing there but had its associations for him, and had borne a part in his experiments or his investigations. Dejectedly he bade Lemulquinier set

free the gases, evaporate the more noxious acids, and take precautions against possible explosions. As he saw to all these details, bitter regrets broke from him, as from a man condemned to death when they are about to lead him to the scaffold.

"Just look!" he said, stopping before a capsule in which the two wires of a voltaic battery were immersed; "we ought to wait to see the result of this experiment. If it were to succeed my children would not drive their father from his house when he could fling diamonds at their feet. Hideous thought! . . . Here is a combination of carbon and sulphur, in which the carbon plays the part of an electro-positive body; crystallization should commence at the negative pole, and in the case of decomposition the carbon would be deposited there in a crystalline form."

"Ah! that is what it will do!" said Lemulquinier, looking admiringly at his master.

"But," Balthazar went on after a moment of silence, "the combination is submitted to the influence of that battery which might act—"

"If monsieur desires it, I will soon increase—"

"No, no; it must be left just as it is. That sort of crystallization requires time, and must be left undisturbed."

"Confound it! the crystallization is long enough about it!" cried the manservant.

"If the temperature were to fall, the sulphide of carbon would crystallize," Balthazar said, letting fall stray links of a chain of ideas which was complete in his own mind; "but suppose the action of the battery is brought to bear on it under certain conditions which I do not know how to set up. . . . This ought to be carefully watched . . . it is possible. . . . But what am I thinking of? There is to be no more chemistry for us, my friend; we must keep books in a receiver's office somewhere in Brittany. . . ."

Claes hurried away and went downstairs to breakfast in his own house for the last time. Pierquin and M. de Solis had joined them. Balthazar was anxious to put an end to

the death-agony of science, said farewell to his children, and stepped into the carriage after his uncle; all the family came with him to the threshold of the door. There, as Marguerite clung to her father in despair, he answered her mute appeal, saying in her ear, "You are a good child; I bear you no ill-will, Marguerite."

Marguerite crossed the courtyard, and took refuge in the parlor; kneeling on the spot where her mother died, she made a fervent prayer to God to give her strength to bring the heavy task of her new life to a successful end. She felt stronger already, for an inner voice echoed the applause of angels through her heart, and with it mingled the thanks of her mother, her sister, and brothers. Emmanuel and Pierquin came in; they had watched the travelling carriage till it was out of sight.

"Now, mademoiselle, what will you do next?" inquired Pierquin.

"Save the family," she said simply. "We have about thirteen hundred acres of land at Waignies. I mean to have it cleared, and to divide it up into three farms, to erect the necessary farm buildings, and then to let them. I feel sure that in a few years' time, with plenty of patience and prudence, each of us three," she said, turning to her brother and sister, "will possess a farm of about four hundred acres, which some day or other will bring in fifteen thousand francs yearly. My brother Gabriel's share must be this house and the consols that stand in his name. Then we will pay off our father's debts by degrees, and give him back his estates when the time comes."

"But, dear cousin," said Pierquin, amazed at Marguerite's clear-headedness and calm summing-up of the situation, "you will want more than two hundred thousand francs if you are going to clear the land and build steadings and buy cattle. Where is the money to come from?"

"That is just where the difficulty comes in," she said, looking from the lawyer to Emmanuel de Solis; "I cannot

venture to ask any more of my uncle; he has already become security for our father."

"You have friends!" cried Pierquin. It suddenly struck him that even yet the Claes girls were worth more than five hundred thousand francs apiece.

Emmanuel looked at Marguerite tenderly; but Pierquin, unluckily for him, was still a notary in the midst of his enthusiasm. He answered accordingly, "I can let you have the two hundred thousand francs!"

Emmanuel and Marguerite sought counsel of each other by a glance, a glance that sent a ray of light through Pierquin's brain. Félicie blushed up to the eyes; she was so glad that her cousin had proved as generous as she had wished. Marguerite looked at her sister, and guessed the truth at once; during her absence the poor child's heart had been won by Pierquin's meaningless gallantry.

"You shall only pay me five per cent," he added, "and repay me when you like; you can give me a mortgage on your farms. But do not trouble yourself about it; you shall have nothing to do but to pay the money when all the contracts are completed; I will find you some good tenants, and look after everything for you. I will do it all for nothing, and stand by you like a trusty kinsman."

Emmanuel made a sign to Marguerite, beseeching her to refuse this offer, but she was too much absorbed in watching the shades of expression that crossed her sister's face to notice him. After a moment's silence she turned to the lawyer with an ironical glance, and answered of her own accord, to M. de Solis's great joy.

"You have stood by us, cousin," she said; "I should have expected no less of you; but we want to free the estates as quickly as possible, and the five per cent interest would hamper us; I shall wait till my brother comes of age, and we will sell his stock."

Pierquin bit his lips, Emmanuel began to smile gently.

"Félicie, dear child, take Jean back to school," said Marguerite, glancing at her brother. "Take Martha with

you. Be very good, Jean, my darling, and do not tear your clothes; we are not rich enough now to buy new ones for you as often as we used to do. There, run away, little man, and work hard at your lessons."

Félicie went out with her brother.

"Cousin," said Marguerite to Pierquin, "and you, monsieur," she added, turning to M. de Solis, "you have doubtless come to visit my father while I was away? I am grateful to you for this proof of your friendship, and I am sure that you will do no less for two poor girls who will stand in need of your advice. Let us understand each other clearly. When I am in Douai I shall always see you with the greatest pleasure; but when Félicie will be left here with no one but Josette and Martha, I need not tell you that she can receive no visitors, not even an old friend and a cousin so devoted to our interests. In our position we must not give the slightest occasion for gossip. We must give our minds to our work for a long time to come and live in solitude."

For several moments no one spoke. Emmanuel, deeply absorbed in watching Marguerite's face, was dumb; Pierquin was at a loss what to say, and took leave of his cousin. He felt furious with himself; he suddenly perceived that Marguerite loved Emmanuel, and that he had acted like the veriest fool.

"Look here, Pierquin, my friend," said he to himself as he went along the street, "any one who called you an ass would say nothing but truth. What a stupid dolt I am! I have twelve thousand livres a year besides my professional income, to say nothing of my uncle des Racquets; all his money will come to me some of these days, and I shall have as much again then (after all, I don't want him to die, he is thrifty), and I was graceless enough to ask Mlle. Claes for interest! No! After all, Félicie is a sweet and good little thing, who will suit me better. Marguerite has a will like iron; she would want to rule me, and—she would rule me! Come, let us show ourselves generous, Pierquin, let us have less of the notary. I cannot shake off old hab-

its. Bless me! I will fall in love with Félicie, those are my sentiments, and I mean to stick to them. Goodness, yes! She will have a farm of her own—four hundred and thirty acres of good land, for the soil at Waignies is rich, and before long it will bring in from fifteen to twenty thousand livres yearly. My uncle des Racquets dies (poor old gentleman!), I sell my practice, and I am a man of leisure worth fifty thousand livres a year,—fif—ty thou—sand livres! My wife is a Claes; I am connected with several families of distinction. *Diantre!* Then we shall see if Savaron de Savarus, the Courtevilles, and Magalhens will decline to visit a Pierquin-Claes-Molina-Nourho! I will be mayor of Douai; I shall have the Cross of the Legion of Honor; I can be a deputy, nothing will be beyond my reach. . . . So look out, Pierquin, my boy, and let us have no more nonsense, inasmuch as, upon my honor, Félicie—Mademoiselle Félicie Van Claes is in love with you."

When the two lovers were alone, Emmanuel held out his hand, and Marguerite could not help laying her right hand in his. The same impulse made them both rise to their feet, and turn to go toward their bench in the garden; but in the middle of the parlor her lover could not control his joy, and in a voice that trembled with emotion, he said to Marguerite —"I have three hundred thousand francs that belong to you—"

"How is that?" she cried; "did my poor mother leave other sums for us in your keeping? . . . No? . . . Then how is this?"

"Oh! my Marguerite, what is mine is yours, is it not? Were you not the first to say *we?*"

"Dear Emmanuel!" she said, pressing the hand that she still held, and instead of going into the garden she sat down in a low chair.

"It is I who should thank you," he said, with love in his voice, "since you accept it from me."

"Dear love," she said, "this moment atones for many

sorrows, and brings us nearer to a happy future! Yes, I will accept your fortune," she continued, and an angelic smile hovered about her mouth; "I know of a way to make it mine."

She looked up at Van Claes's portrait, as if calling on her ancestor to be a witness. Emmanuel de Solis had followed the direction of her eyes; he did not see her draw a little ring from her finger; he did not notice that she had done so until he heard the words—"Out of the depths of our sorrow one comfort has arisen; my father's indifference leaves me free to dispose of myself," she said, holding out the ring. "Take it, Emmanuel; my mother loved you, she would have chosen you."

Tears came to Emmanuel's eyes; he turned pale, fell on his knees, and said to Marguerite, as he gave her the ring that he always wore—"Here is my mother's wedding ring. My Marguerite" (and he kissed the little golden hoop), "shall I have no pledge but this?"

She bent forward, and Emmanuel's lips touched her forehead.

"Alas! poor love, are we not doing wrong?" she said in a trembling voice. "We shall have to wait for a long while."

"My uncle used to say that adoration was the daily bread of patience; he spoke of the Christian's love of God; but in this way I can love you, Marguerite;—for a long while the thought of you has mingled with the thought of God so that I cannot separate them; I am yours, as I am His."

For a few moments they remained rapt in the sweetest ecstasy. Their feelings were poured out as quietly and naturally as a spring wells up and overflows in little waves that never cease. The fate which kept the two lovers apart was a source of melancholy, which gave to their happiness something of the poignancy of grief. Félicie came back again, all too soon for them. Emmanuel, taught by the charming tact of love, which in-

stinctively divines everything, left the two sisters together with a glance in which Marguerite could read how much this consideration cost him—a glance that told her how long and ardently he had desired this happiness which had just been consecrated by the betrothal of their hearts.

"Come here, little sister," said Marguerite, putting her arm round Félicie's neck. They went together out into the garden, and sat down on the bench to which one generation after another had confided their love and grief, their plans and musings. In spite of her sister's gay tones and shrewd, kindly smile, Félicie felt something very like a tremor of fear. Marguerite took her hand, and felt that she was trembling.

"Mademoiselle Félicie," her older sister said in her ear, "I am reading your heart. Pierquin has been here very often while I was away; he came every evening, he has whispered sweet words, and you have listened to him."

Félicie blushed.

"Do not defend yourself, my angel," Marguerite answered; "it is so natural to love! Perhaps our cousin's character may alter under the influence of your dear soul; he is selfish, and thinks only of his own interests, but he is kind-hearted, and his very faults will no doubt conduce to your happiness, for he will love you as the fairest of his possessions, you will be a part of his business affairs. Forgive me for that word, darling! You will cure him of the bad habit of thinking of nothing but material interests by teaching him to occupy himself with the affairs of the heart."

Félicie could only put her arms round her sister.

"Besides," Marguerite went on, "he is well-to-do. He belongs to one of the most distinguished and oldest bourgeois families. And you cannot think that I would put obstacles in the way of your happiness, if you choose to find it in a sphere somewhat beneath you?"

"Dear sister!" broke from Félicie.

"Oh, yes; you may trust me!" cried Marguerite. "What

more natural than that we should tell each other our secrets?"

These words, so heartily spoken, opened the way for one of those delightful talks in which young girls confide everything to each other. Love had made Marguerite quick to read her sister's heart, and she said at last to Félicie—"Well, dear little one, we must make sure that the cousin really loves you, and then—"

"Leave it to me," said Félicie, laughing; "I have an example here before me."

"Little goose!" said Marguerite, kissing her forehead.

Pierquin belonged to the class of men who regard marriage as a business contract, a fulfilment of social duties, and a way of transmitting property; it was to him a matter of indifference whether he married Marguerite or Félicie, so long as both bore the same family name and possessed the same amount of dower; yet he was acute enough to see that both of them, to use his own expression, were "romantic and sentimental girls," two adjectives employed by commonplace people to ridicule the gifts which nature sows with a grudging hand in the furrows of the human field. Doubtless the lawyer concluded that he had best do at Rome as the Romans do; for the next day he came to see Marguerite, and with a mysterious air took her out into the little garden and began to talk "sentiment," since this was a necessary preliminary, according to social usages, to the usual formal contract drawn up by a lawyer.

"Dear cousin," said he, "we have not always been of one mind as to the best means of bringing you out of your difficulties, but you must acknowledge that I have always been prompted by a strong desire to serve you. Well, then, yesterday my offer of help was completely spoiled by an unlucky trick of speaking, due simply to a lawyer's habit of mind. Do you understand? My heart is not to blame for the absurd piece of folly. I have cared very much about you, and we lawyers have a certain quick-sightedness; I saw that you did not like what I said. It is my own fault! Some

one else has been cleverer than I was. Well, I have come to tell you out and out that I love your sister Félicie. So you can treat me as a brother, dip in my purse, take what you will, the more you take, the better you will prove your regard for me. I am wholly at your service, *without interest*—do you understand?—of any sort or description. If only I may be thought worthy of Félicie, that is all I ask. Forgive me for my mistakes, they are due to business habits; my heart is right enough, and I would throw myself into the Scarpe rather than not make my wife happy."

"This is very satisfactory, cousin; but the matter does not rest with me, it rests with my sister and father," said Marguerite.

"I know that, dear cousin," the notary answered; "but you are like a mother to them all; besides, I have nothing more nearly at heart than that you should judge of mine correctly."

This way of speaking was characteristic of the honest notary. Later in life, Pierquin's reply to an invitation from the commanding officer at Saint Omer became famous; the latter had asked him to some military festivity, and Pierquin's response was worded thus: "Monsieur Pierquin-Claes de Molina-Nourho, Mayor of the city of Douai, Chevalier of the Legion of Honor, will have *that* of being present," etc.

Marguerite accepted his offer only in so far as it related to his professional advice, fearing to compromise her dignity as a woman, her sister's future, or her father's authority. The same day she confided her sister to the care of Josette and Martha, who were devoted body and soul to their young mistress, and entered into all her plans of retrenchment; and Marguerite set out at once for Waignies, where she began to put her schemes into execution at once, benefited by Pierquin's experience.

The notary reckoned up the time and trouble expended, and regarded it as an excellent investment; he was putting them out to interest, as it were, and, with such a prospect before him, he had no mind to grudge the outlay.

In the first place, he endeavored to spare Marguerite the trouble of clearing the land and getting it ready for cultivation. He found three sons of wealthy farmers, young men who were anxious to settle themselves; to them he pointed out the attractive possibilities offered by such a fertile soil, and succeeded in letting the land to them just as it was, on a long lease. For the first three years they were to pay no rent at all, in the fourth they undertook to pay six thousand francs, twelve thousand in the sixth, and after that, fifteen thousand francs yearly till the expiration of the lease. They also undertook to drain the land, to make plantations, and purchase cattle. While the steadings were in course of erection they began to clear the gound.

Four years after Balthazar's departure, Marguerite had almost retrieved the fortunes of her brother and sister. Two hundred thousand francs, loaned by Emmanuel de Solis, had covered the expenses of the farm buildings. Advice and more substantial help had been readily given to the brave girl, for every one admired Marguerite's courage. She personally superintended the building operations, and looked after her contracts and leases with the good sense, energy, and perseverance which a woman can display when she is sustained by strong feeling.

After the fifth year Marguerite could devote thirty thousand francs of her income to paying off the mortgages on her father's property, and to repairing the havoc wrought by Balthazar's passion in the old house. Besides the rent from their own farms, they had the interest on the capital invested in her brother's name, and the proceeds of her father's property. The process of extinction of the debt was bound to be more and more rapid as the amount of interest decreased. Emmanuel de Solis, moreover, had persuaded Marguerite to take the remaining hundred thousand francs of his uncle's bequest, as well as some twenty thousand francs which he himself had saved, so that in the third year of her administration she could pay off a fairly large amount of debt. This life of courage, self-denial, and self-sacrifice lasted for five

years, but it ended at last, thanks to Marguerite's influence and supervision, in complete success.

Gabriel had become a civil engineer, and with his great-uncle's help had made a rapid fortune by the construction of a canal. He found favor in the eyes of his cousin, Mlle. Conyncks, whom her father idolized, one of the richest heiresses in all Flanders. In 1824 Claes's property was free, and the house in the Rue de Paris had repaired its losses. Pierquin made a formal application to Balthazar for Félicie's hand, and M. de Solis asked for Marguerite.

At the beginning of the month of January, 1825, Marguerite and M. Conyncks set out for Brittany to bring back the exiled father, whom every one longed to see in his home again. He had resigned his post that he might spend the rest of his days among his children, and his presence should sanction their happiness. Marguerite had often bewailed the empty spaces on the walls of the picture-gallery and the state apartments, which must meet their father's eyes on his return, so that while she was away Pierquin and M. de Solis plotted with Félicie to prepare a surprise for her; the younger sister should also have a share in the restoration of the Maison Claes. Both gentlemen had bought several fine pictures, which they presented to Félicie, so that the gallery might be adorned as of old. The same thought had occurred to M. Conyncks, who wished to show his appreciation of Marguerite's noble conduct, and of the way in which she had devoted herself to fulfilling her dying mother's request. He arranged that fifty of his finest pictures, together with some of those that Balthazar had previously sold, should be sent to fill the picture-gallery, where there were now no more blank spaces.

Marguerite had visited her father several times, Jean or her sister accompanying her on each journey; but, since her last visit, old age seemed to have gained on Balthazar. He lived extremely penuriously, for nearly all his income was spent on the experiment which brought nothing but disappointment, and probably the alarming symptoms were due

to his manner of life. He was only sixty-five years of age, but he looked like a man of eighty. His eyes were deeply sunk in his face, his eyebrows were white, his hair hung in a scanty fringe round his head, he allowed his beard to grow, cutting it with a pair of scissors when its length annoyed him, he stooped like an old vine-dresser, his neglected dress suggested a degree of wretchedness that was frightful when combined with his look of decrepitude. Sometimes his face looked noble still when a great thought lighted it up, but the outlines of his features were obliterated by wrinkles; his fixed gaze, the desperate look in his eyes, and his restless uneasiness seemed to be symptoms of insanity, or rather of many forms of insanity. A sudden gleam of hope would give him the look of a monomaniac; an access of impatience, that he could not guess this secret which flitted before him and eluded his grasp like a will-o'-the-wisp, would blaze out into impotent anger like madness, to be followed by a burst of laughter at his own folly; but as a rule he lived in a state of the deepest dejection, and every phase of frenzy was merged in the dull melancholy of the idiot. However fleeting and imperceptible these changes of expression might be for strangers, they were unhappily only too obvious for those who had known the once noble face, the Claes of former years, so sublime in goodness and so great-hearted, of whom scarcely a trace could now be recognized.

Lemulquinier, like his master, was old and worn by incessant toil, but he had not borne the same burden, nor endured the constant strain of thought; a curious mixture of anxiety and admiration in the way in which he looked at his master might easily have misled a casual observer; he listened respectfully to Claes's slightest word, and watched his movements with a kind of tenderness; he looked after his great and learned master with a care like a mother's; he even seemed to protect him, and, in some ways, actually did protect him, for Balthazar never took any thought for the needs of physical existence. It was touching and painful to see the two old men, both wrapped in the same thought,

both so sure of the reality of their hope, inspired by the same restless longing; it was as if they had but one life between them—the one was the soul, and the other the body. When Marguerite and M. Conyncks arrived they found M. Claes living in an inn; his successor had taken his place at once.

Through all the preoccupation of science, Balthazar had felt stirrings of the desire to see his country, his home, and children once more; his daughter's letter had brought good news; he had begun to dream of a crowning series of experiments, which should surely yield at last the secret of the Absolute, and he awaited Marguerite's coming with great impatience.

The young girl shed tears of joy as she flung herself into his arms. This time she had come to receive her reward, the reward of a painful and difficult task, and to ask pardon for her brilliant success in it. But as she looked more closely at her father, she was shocked at the changes wrought in him since the previous visit; she felt as if she had committed a crime, like some great man who violates the liberties of his country to save its national existence. M. Conyncks shared his niece's misgivings; he insisted that his cousin must be moved at once, that the air of his native Douai might restore him to health, as the life by his own hearth should restore his reason.

After the first outpourings of affection, which were much warmer on Balthazar's part than Marguerite had expected, he was strangely attentive to her wishes; he expressed his regret at receiving her in such a poor place; he consulted her tastes in the ordering of their meals, and was as sedulously watchful as a lover. But in his manner also there was something of the uneasiness and anxiety of the culprit who wishes to secure a favorable hearing from a judge. Marguerite knew her father so well that she guessed the motives underlying this affectionate solicitude; she thought that he must have incurred debts in the town, which he was anxious to pay before he went. She watched her father

narrowly for a while, and a human heart was laid bare to her gaze. Balthazar seemed to have grown little. The consciousness of his humiliation, the enforced isolation resulting from his scientific pursuits, had made him shy and almost like a child, save when the subject under discussion was connected with his beloved science. He stood in awe of his oldest daughter; he remembered her devotion in the past, the power of mind and character that she had shown, the authority with which he himself had invested her, the fortune which she had administered so ably; and the indefinable feeling of dread which had taken possession of him on the day when he resigned the authority which he had abused had no doubt grown stronger with time.

Conyncks seemed to be as nothing in Balthazar's eyes; he saw no one but his daughter, and thought of no one else; he even seemed to dread her, as a weak-minded man is overawed by the wife whose will is stronger than his own. Marguerite's heart smote her when she detected a look of terror in his eyes, an expression like that of some little child who has been doing wrong. The noble girl could not understand the contradiction between the magnificent stern outlines of the head, the features worn by scientific labors and strenuous thought, and the weak smile on Balthazar's lips, the expression of artless servility in his face. This sharp contrast between greatness and littleness was very painful to her; she resolved to use her influence to restore her father's self-respect before the great day which was to restore him to his family. When they were left together for a moment, she began at once, seizing the opportunity to say in his ear —"Have you any debts here, father?"

Balthazar reddened uneasily, and answered, "I do not know, but Lemulquinier will tell you; he is a good fellow, and knows more about my affairs than I do myself."

Marguerite rang for the servant, and when he came she could not help studying the faces of the two old men.

"Is something wanted, monsieur?" asked Lemulquinier.

Personal pride and family pride were two of Marguerite's

strongest instincts; something in the servant's tone and manner told of an unseemly familiarity between her father and the companion of his labors which gave her a pang.

"It seems that my father is unable to reckon up what he owes here without your memory to aid him, Lemulquinier," said Marguerite.

"Monsieur owes . . ." Lemulquinier began, but checked himself at a sign from Balthazar, which did not escape Marguerite. She felt surprised and humiliated.

"Tell me exactly how much my father owes," she exclaimed.

"Monsieur owes five thousand francs here in the town to a druggist and wholesale grocer who has supplied us with caustic potash, lead and zinc, and reagents."

"Is that all?" asked Marguerite.

Balthazar made an affirmative sign to Lemulquinier, who answered like a man under a spell, "Yes, mademoiselle."

"Very well," she said, "I will give you the money."

Balthazar kissed his daughter in his joy. "You are my guardian angel, my child," he said.

He breathed more freely after that. There was less sadness in his eyes as he looked at her; but, in spite of his joy, Marguerite could see that in the depths of his heart he was still troubled, and she guessed that the five thousand francs merely represented the most pressing of the debts contracted for the expenses of the laboratory.

"Be frank with me, father," she said, as she let him draw her toward him, and sat on his knees; "do you owe more than this? Tell me everything; come back to your home without any lurking fear in your mind in the midst of the rejoicing."

"My dear Marguerite," he answered, taking her hands and kissing them with a grace that seemed like a memory of his youth, "shall you scold me—?"

"No," she said.

"Really?" he asked, with an involuntary start of childish joy. "Can I really tell you everything? and will you pay—?"

"Yes," she said, trying to keep back the tears that came to her eyes.

"Very well, then, I owe . . . Oh! I dare not! . . ."

"Father, do tell me!"

"But it is a great deal," he went on.

She clasped her hands in despair.

"I owe thirty thousand francs to MM. Protez and Chiffreville."

"Thirty thousand francs—all my savings," she said; "but I am glad that I can give them to you," she added, with a reverent kiss on his forehead.

He sprang to his feet, caught his daughter in his arms, and spun round the room with her, lifting her off her feet as though she had been a child; then he set her down in the armchair where she had been sitting, exclaiming, "My dear child, my treasure of love! There was no life left in me. Protez and Chiffreville have written three times; they threaten proceedings—proceedings against *me*, when I have made their fortunes—"

"Then you are still trying to find the solution of your problem, father?" said Marguerite sadly.

"Yes, still," he said, with a frenzied smile, "and I shall find it, never fear! . . . If you only knew where we are!"

"*We*, who?"

"I mean Mulquinier; he understands me at last; he is a great help to me. . . . Poor fellow, he is so faithful!"

Conyncks came in at that moment, and put an end to their conversation. Marguerite made a sign to her father to say no more; she dreaded lest he should lower himself in their uncle's eyes.

It shocked her to see the havoc wrought in that great intellect by incessant preoccupation with a problem perhaps after all insoluble. Balthazar, doubtless, could see nothing beyond his crucibles and furnaces; it never even crossed his mind that his affairs were no longer embarrassed.

They set out for Flanders next day; the journey was a sufficiently long one, and Marguerite had time to see many

things on the way that threw gleams of light on the relative positions of Lemulquinier and his master. Had the servant gained the ascendency which uneducated minds can acquire over the greatest thinkers if they feel that they are indispensable to their betters? Such natures use concession after concession as stepping-stones to complete dominion, and attain their end at last by dint of dogged persistence. Or, on the other hand, was it the master who had come to feel for the servant the sort of affection that springs from use and wont, not unlike the fondness which a craftsman feels for his tool which executes his will, or the Arab for the horse to which he owes his freedom? Little things that passed under Marguerite's watchful eyes decided her to put this affection to the test, by proposing to free Balthazar from what perhaps was a galling yoke.

They spent a few days in Paris on their way back. Marguerite paid her father's debts, and besought the firm of chemists to send nothing to Douai without first giving her notice of Claes's orders. She persuaded her father to make some changes in his costume, and to dress as became a man of his rank. This external transformation gave Balthazar a sort of physical dignity, which augured well for a change in his ideas. Marguerite already felt something of the happiness which she looked for when her father should find the surprises that awaited him in his own house; and their departure for Douai was not long delayed.

Félicie, accompanied by her two brothers, Emmanuel, Pierquin, and the most intimate friends of the three families, rode out three leagues from the town to meet Balthazar. The long journey had given other directions to the chemist's thoughts, the sight of the Flemish landscape had stirred his heart, so that at the sight of the joyous cortège of children and friends he felt so deeply touched that tears filled his eyes, his voice shook, and his eyelids reddened; he took his children in his arms, and seemed as if he could not let them go, showing such passionate affection for them that the onlookers were moved to tears.

He turned pale when he saw his house once more, and sprang out of the carriage with the quickness of a young man; it seemed to be a pleasure to him to breathe the air in the courtyard once more, to see every trifling detail again; his happiness was plainly visible in every gesture that he made; he held himself erect, his face grew young again.

Tears came to his eyes as he stood in the doorway of the parlor, and saw how accurately his daughter had reproduced the old-fashioned silver sconces which he had sold, and how completely every trace of their misfortunes had disappeared. A magnificent breakfast awaited them in the dining-room; the shelves above the sideboards had been filled with curiosities and silver-plate at least as valuable as the heirlooms which formerly had stood there. Long as the family breakfast lasted, Balthazar scarcely heard all that he wished to hear from each of his children. His return had brought about a sort of reaction in him; he thought of nothing but family happiness; he was a father before all things. There was the old courtliness in his manner. In the joy of that first moment of possession he did not ask by what means all that he had squandered had been recovered, and his happiness was complete and entire.

Breakfast over, the father and his four children, and Pierquin the notary, went into the parlor, and Balthazar saw, not without uneasiness, the stamped papers which a clerk had arranged on the table by which he stood, as if awaiting further instructions from his employer. Balthazar stood in amazement before the hearth as his family seated themselves.

"This," said Pierquin, "is an account of his guardianship rendered by M. Claes to his children. It is not very amusing of course," he added, laughing after the manner of notaries, who are wont to adopt a jesting tone over the gravest matters of business, "but it is absolutely necessary that you should hear it read."

Although the circumstances of the case might justify the use of this phrase, M. Claes, with an uneasy conscience, must needs think it a reproach, and he frowned. The clerk began

to read; the further he read, the greater grew Balthazar's astonishment. In the first place, it was ascertained that at the time of his wife's death her fortune had amounted to about sixteen hundred thousand francs, and at the conclusion of the statement of accounts each child's share was paid in full, everything was clear and straightforward, as if the most prudent father of a family had administered the estate. It was shown incidentally that Gabriel's mortgage on the house had been paid off, that Balthazar's dwelling was his own, and that his estates were free from all liabilities. He had recovered his honor as a man, his position as a citizen, his existence as a father all at once; he sank into an armchair, and looked round for Marguerite, but, with a woman's exquisite delicacy of feeling, she had stolen away during the reading, to make sure that all her arrangements for the fête had been fully carried out. Every one of Claes's children understood what was passing in his mind when through a film of tears his eyes sought for his daughter; she seemed to their inner vision like a strong, bright angel. Gabriel went to find Marguerite, Balthazar heard her footstep, hurried toward her, met her at the foot of the staircase, and clasped her in his arms.

"Father," she said, as the old man held her tightly, "do nothing, I implore you, to lessen your sacred authority. You must thank me, before them all, for carrying out your wishes so well; *you*, and you alone, must be the author of the changes for the better which may have been effected here."

Balthazar raised his eyes to heaven, looked at his daughter and folded his arms; his face wore a look which none of his children had seen for ten years, as he said, "Why are you not here, Pepita, to admire our child?"

He could say no more. He held his daughter in a tight embrace for a moment, and went back to the parlor.

"Children," he said, with the noble bearing which had so pre-eminently distinguished him in former years, "we all owe a debt of thanks and gratitude to my daughter

Marguerite for the courage and prudence with which she has carried out my plans, while I, too much absorbed by scientific research, left the administration of our affairs and the reins of authority in her hands."

"Ah! now we will read the marriage contracts," said Pierquin, glancing at the clock. "But I have nothing to do with that, inasmuch as the law forbids me to draw up documents for myself and my relations; so M. Raparlier's uncle is coming."

The friends who had been invited to the dinner given to celebrate M. Claes's return and the signing of the contracts now began to arrive, and the servants brought the wedding presents. The assemblage, which rapidly grew, was brilliant by reason of the rank of the visitors and the splendor of their toilets. The three families thus brought together to witness their children's happiness had striven to outshine each other. The parlor was filled almost at once with splendid gifts for the betrothed couples. Gold flowed in on them and sparkled there, stuffs lay unfolded, cashmere shawls lay among necklaces and jewels. Givers and receivers alike felt heartfelt joy; an almost childish delight shone visibly in all faces, so that the magnificence and costliness of the gifts were forgotten by those less nearly concerned, who, as a rule, are sufficiently ready to amuse themselves by counting up the cost.

The ceremony soon began. After the manner traditional in the family of Claes, the parents alone were seated; every one else who was present remained standing about them at a little distance. On the side of the parlor nearest the garden stood Gabriel Claes and Mlle. Conyncks, next to them M. de Solis and Marguerite, her sister Félicie and Pierquin. Balthazar and M. Conyncks (the only two who were seated) took up their position on either side of the notary who had succeeded Pierquin. Jean stood behind his father's armchair; and on the opposite side of the room, nearest the courtyard, stood an imposing circle, composed of a score of well-dressed women and several men, near relations of Pier-

quin, Conyncks, or of the Claes, the mayor of Douai, before whom the marriages were to take place, and a dozen of the most devoted friends of the three families, including the First President of the Court Royal of Douai, and the curé of Saint-Pierre. The homage paid by such an assemblage to the fathers, who seemed for a moment to be invested with regal dignity, gave an almost patriarchal color to the scene. For the first time, during sixteen years, Balthazar forgot the Quest of the Absolute for a moment.

All the persons who had been invited to the signing of the contract and to the dinner were now present. M. Raparlier, having ascertained this from Marguerite and her sister, had returned to his place and taken up the contract of marriage between Marguerite and Emmanuel de Solis, which was to be read first, when the door suddenly flew open, and Lemulquinier's face appeared beaming with joy and excitement.

"Monsieur! monsieur!" he called.

Balthazar gave Marguerite a despairing glance, beckoned to her, and they went out into the garden together. A presentiment of impending trouble fell on those assembled.

"I did not dare to tell you, dear child," the father said to his daughter, "but you have done so much for me that you will surely help me out of this new trouble. Lemulquinier loaned me his savings for my last experiment, which was unsuccessful; he loaned me twenty thousand francs, and doubtless the wretched fellow has found out that I am rich again, and wants to have his money; let him have it at once. Oh! my angel, you owe your father's life to him, for he was my sole support and comfort through all my failures; he alone still had faith in me. Without him I must have died—"

"Monsieur, monsieur!" cried Lemulquinier.

"Well?" said Balthazar, turning toward him.

"A diamond!"

At the sight of the diamond in the old servant's hand, Claes rushed to the parlor. Lemulquinier began in a whisper—"I went up to the laboratory—"

The chemist, completely forgetful of his surroundings, gave the old Fleming a look which can only be rendered by the words—"*You were the first to go up to the laboratory!*"

"And I found this diamond there," the servant went on, "in the capsule which communicated with that battery which we left to its own devices—and it has done the trick, sir!" he added, holding up a white diamond of octahedral form, so brilliant that the eyes of all those assembled were attracted by it.

"My children and friends," said Balthazar, "forgive my old servant, forgive me. . . . This will drive me mad! At some time during the past seven years chance has brought about in my laboratory this result that I have sought in vain to compass for sixteen years—and I was not there! How has it come about? I have no idea. Oh, yes, I know that I submitted a combination of sulphur and carbon to the influence of a voltaic battery, but the process should have been watched from day to day. And now, during my absence, the power of God has been manifested in my laboratory, and I have been unable to watch its workings, for this has been brought about gradually, of course! It is overwhelming, is it not? Accursed exile! accursed fatality! Ah! if only I had watched this long, this slow, this sudden —I know not what to call it—crystallization, transformation, *miracle* in fact, my children would be—well, richer still. Perhaps the Problem would still remain to be solved, but at least the first rays of the dawn of my glory would have shone upon my country; and this moment, when the longings of affection are satisfied, though it glows with our happiness, would have been gladdened yet more by the sunlight of science."

Every one kept silence; the disconnected phrases wrung from him by agony were too sincere not to be sublime. All at once Balthazar recovered himself, forced back his despair into some inner depth, and gave the assembly a majestic glance. Other souls caught something of his enthusiasm.

He took the diamond and held it out to Marguerite, saying—"It belongs to you, my angel."

He dismissed Lemulquinier by a sign, and spoke to the notary—"Let us go on," he said.

The words produced a sensation among those who heard them, a responsive thrill such as Talma, in some of his parts, could awaken in a vast listening audience that hung on his words. Balthazar sat down, saying to himself, "To-day I must be a father only." He spoke in a low voice; but Marguerite, who overheard him, went over to her father, and reverently kissed his hand.

"Never was there a man so great!" said Emmanuel, when his betrothed returned to his side; "never was there so strong a will; any other would have gone mad."

As soon as the three contracts had been read and signed, every one crowded about Balthazar to ask how the diamond had been made, but he could throw no light on the mysterious event. He looked out at the attic, and pointed to it in a kind of frenzy.

"Yes, the awful power which results from the vibrations of glowing matter, which doubtless produces metals and diamonds, manifested itself there," he said, "for one moment—by chance."

"A chance that came about quite naturally," said one of those people who like to account for everything; "the old gentleman left a real diamond lying about. It is so much saved out of all that he has burned up."

"Let us forget this," said Balthazar to the friends who stood about him; "I beg you will not speak of it again to me to-day."

Marguerite took her father's arm to lead him to the state apartments, where a banquet had been prepared. As he followed his guests along the gallery, he saw that it was filled with rare flowers, and that the walls were covered with pictures.

"Pictures!" he cried, "pictures!—and some of the old ones!"

He stopped; for a moment he looked gloomy and sad; he knew by the extent of his own humiliation how great had been the wrong that he had done his children.

"All this is yours, father," said Marguerite, guessing Balthazar's trouble.

"Angel, over whom the angels in heaven must surely rejoice," he cried, "how many times you have given life to your father."

"Let there be no cloud on your brow, and not the least sad thought left in your heart," she answered, "and you will have rewarded me beyond my hopes. I have just been thinking about Lemulquinier, dearest father; little things you have said of him now and then have made me esteem him, and I confess I have been unjust to him; he ought to live here as a humble friend of yours. Never mind about your debt to him; Emmanuel has saved nearly sixty thousand francs, and Lemulquinier shall have the money. After he has served you so faithfully, he ought to spend the rest of his days in comfort. And do not be troubled on our account. M. de Solis and I mean to live simply and quietly—without luxury; we can spare the money until you are able to return it."

"Oh, my child! you must never leave me! you must always be your father's providence!"

When they reached the state apartments, Balthazar saw that they had been restored and furnished as splendidly as before. The guests presently went down to the dining-room on the ground floor, flowering shrubs stood on every step of the great staircase. A service of silver plate of marvellous workmanship, Gabriel's gift to his father, attracted all eyes by its splendor; it was a surprise even to the proudest burghers of Douai, who are accustomed to a lavish display of silver. The guests were waited upon by the servants of the three households of Claes, Conyncks, and Pierquin; Lemulquinier stood behind his master's chair. Balthazar, in the midst of his kinsfolk at the head of the table, read heartfelt joy in the happy faces that encircled it, and felt so deeply

moved that every one was silent, as men are silent in the presence of a great joy or sorrow.

"Dear children!" he said, "you have killed the fatted calf for the return of the prodigal father."

The phrase in which the chemist summed up his position, and which perhaps anticipated harsher criticism, was spoken so generously that every one present was moved to tears; but with the tears the last trace of sadness vanished, and happiness found its expression in the blithe merriment characteristic of family festivals. After the dinner the principal families of Douai began to arrive for the ball, and in its restoration the Maison Claes more than equalled its traditional splendor.

The three weddings shortly followed; the ensuing rejoicings, balls, and banquets drew Claes into the vortex of social life for several months. His oldest son went to live near Cambrai on an estate belonging to his father-in-law, for M. Conyncks could not bear to be separated from his daughter. Mme. Pierquin likewise left her father's roof to preside over a mansion which Pierquin had built, where he meant to live in all the dignity befitting his rank, for he had sold his practice, and his uncle des Racquets had recently died and left him all the wealth which he had slowly amassed. Jean went to Paris to finish his education; so of all his children, only M. and Mme. de Solis remained with Balthazar in the old house. He had given up the family home at the back to them, and lived himself on the second story of the front building. So Marguerite still watched over Balthazar's comfort, and Emmanuel helped her in the congenial task.

The noble girl received from the hands of love the crown most eagerly desired of all—the wreath that is woven by happiness and kept fresh by constancy. Indeed, no more perfect picture of the pure, complete, and acknowledged happiness, of which all women fondly dream, could be found. The unity of heart between two beings who had faced the trials of life so bravely, and who felt for each other such a

sacred affection, called forth the admiration and respect of those who knew them.

M. de Solis, who for some time had held an appointment as Inspector-General of the University, resigned his post to enjoy his happiness at his leisure, and remained in Douai, where his character and talents were held in such high esteem that his election as a deputy when the time came was already spoken of as certain.

Marguerite, who had been so strong in adversity, became a sweet and tender woman in prosperity. Through the rest of that year Claes was certainly deeply absorbed in his studies; but though he made a few experiments, involving but little expense, his ordinary income was sufficient for his requirements, and he seemed to neglect his laboratory work. Marguerite had adopted the old tradition of the house, gave a family dinner every month, to which her father, the Pierquins, and the Conyncks came, and received her own circle of acquaintances one day in the week. Her *cafés* had a great vogue. Claes was usually present on these occasions, though he sometimes seemed to be scarcely conscious of his surroundings; but he went into society again so cheerfully to please his daughter that his children might well imagine that he had given up the attempt to solve his Problem. In this way three years went by.

In 1828 a piece of good fortune which befell Emmanuel took him to Spain. Although three numerous families, branches of the house of Solis, stood between him and the family estates, yellow fever, old age, and various freaks of fortune combined to leave them all childless, and the titles and entail passed to Emmanuel, who was the last of his family. By one of those chances which seem less improbable in real life than in books, the lands and titles of the Counts of Nourho had been acquired by the House of Solis. Marguerite would not be separated from her husband, who would be forced to stay long enough in Spain to settle his affairs; moreover, she looked forward to seeing the chateau of Casa-Real, where her mother had passed her childhood,

and the city of Granada, the cradle of the de Solis family. So she went with her husband, leaving the household to Martha, Josette, and Lemulquinier, who were accustomed to its management. Marguerite had proposed to Balthazar that he should go with them, and he had declined on the score of his great age; but the fact was that he had long meditated certain experiments, which should realize his hopes at last, and this was the true reason of his refusal.

The Comte and Comtesse de Solis y Nourho stayed longer in Spain than they had intended, and a child was born to them there. It was not until the middle of the year 1830 that they reached Cadiz, intending to return to France by way of Italy; but at Cadiz a letter came from Félicie bringing evil tidings. Inside of eighteen months their father had completely ruined himself. Gabriel and Pierquin were obliged to allow him a fixed sum every month to pay for necessary expenses, and the money was paid to Lemulquinier. The old servant had sacrificed his savings a second time to his master. Balthazar saw no one; not even his own children were admitted into the house. Josette and Martha were both dead; the coachman, the cook, and the rest of the servants had been dismissed one after another, and the horses and carriages had been sold. Although Lemulquinier was discreet and taciturn, there was too good ground for believing that the money which Gabriel Claes and Pierquin allowed him for necessaries was spent on his experiments. Indeed, Gabriel and Pierquin were paying the interest of a mortgage on the Maison Claes, effected without their knowledge, lest the house should be sold above his head. None of his children had any influence with the old man of seventy, who still possessed such extraordinary energy and determination even in trifles. It was just possible that Marguerite might regain her old ascendency over him, and Félicie begged her sister to come home at once; she was in terror lest her father should have put his name to bills once more. Gabriel, Conyncks, and Pierquin had taken

alarm at this persistent madness which had spent seven millions of francs without result, and had decided not to pay M. Claes's debts. This letter changed Marguerite's travelling plans; she took the shortest way home to Douai. With her past savings and newly acquired wealth it would be easy to pay her father's debts once more; but she determined to do more than this, she would fulfil her mother's wishes; Balthazar Claes should not sink into a dishonored grave. Clearly she alone had sufficient influence with him to prevent him from carrying out his ruinous career to its natural end, at a time of life when great results could scarcely be expected from his enfeebled powers; but she wished to persuade him, and not to wound his susceptibilities, fearing to imitate the children of Sophocles; possibly her father, after all, was nearing the solution of the scientific problem to which he had sacrificed so much.

M. and Mme. de Solis reached Flanders in 1831, and arrived in Douai one morning toward the end of September. Marguerite ordered the coachman to drive to her house in the Rue de Paris, and found it shut up; a violent ring at the door bell produced no answer. A shopkeeper, who lived opposite, left his doorstep, whither he had been brought by the noise of the carriages; many of the neighbors were at their windows, partly because they were glad to see the return of a family so much beloved in the town, partly stirred by a vague feeling of curiosity as to what might happen when Marguerite came back to the Maison Claes. The shopkeeper told the Comte de Solis's man that old M. Claes had left the house about an hour before. Lemulquinier had doubtless taken him to walk upon the ramparts.

Marguerite sent for a locksmith to force open the door, so as to avoid a scene with her father, if (as Félicie's letter had led her to expect) he should refuse to allow her to enter the house. Emmanuel himself, meanwhile, went in search of the old man to bring him the news of his daughter's ar-

rival, and despatched his man with a message to M. and Mme. Pierquin.

It did not take long to force open the door. Marguerite went to the parlor to give directions about their baggage. A shiver of horror went through her as she entered—the walls were as bare as if a fire had swept over them. Van Huysium's wonderful carvings and the portrait of the great Claes had been sold to Lord Spencer, so some one said. The dining-room was empty; there was nothing there but two straw-bottomed chairs, and a wretched table, on which Marguerite saw, with dreadful misgivings, a couple of bowls and plates, two silver spoons and forks, and, on a dish, the remains of a herring, the meal, doubtless, of which Claes and his servant had just partaken. As she hurried through the state apartments, she saw that every room was as bare and forlorn as the parlor and the dining-room; the idea of the Absolute seemed to have passed through the whole house like a fire.

For all furniture in her father's room, there was a bed, a chair, and a table; a tallow candle burned down to the socket stood in a battered copper candlestick. The house had been stripped so completely that there were no curtains in the windows; everything that could bring in a few pence, even the kitchen utensils, had been sold. Drawn by the feeling of curiosity that survives in us even in the deepest misfortune, Marguerite looked into Lemulquinier's room; it was as bare and empty as his master's. The drawer in the table stood half open, and Marguerite caught a glimpse of a pawn-ticket; the servant had pledged his watch a few days previously. She hastened to the attic; the laboratory was as well replenished as it used to be; finally, she had the door of her own room forced open: everything was as she had left it, her father had respected her apartment.

Marguerite glanced round her, burst into tears, and in her heart forgave her father. Even in the frenzy of enthusiasm, which spared nothing else, he had been checked by fatherly love and a feeling of gratitude toward her. This

proof of tenderness, received in the depths of her despair, wrought in Marguerite one of those revulsions which prove too strong for the coldest hearts. She went down to the parlor, and waited for her father's coming, with an anxiety which was increased by horrible fears; she was about to see him; would he be changed? Should she see a decrepit, ailing wreck, emaciated by fastings endured through pride? Suppose his reason had failed? Her tears flowed fast in the profaned sanctuary. Scenes of her past life rose up before her. She remembered her struggles, her vain attempts to save her father from himself, her childish days, the mother who had been so happy and so unhappy; everything about her, even the face of her little Joseph who smiled on the desolation, seemed to form part of some unreal, mournful tragedy.

But for all her sad forebodings, she did not foresee the catastrophe of the drama of her father's life, a life so magnificent and so wretched. Claes's affairs were no secret. To the shame of humanity, there were no generous natures to be found in Douai who could reverence the passionate persistence of the man of genius. Balthazar was put under the ban of society; he was a bad father, who had run through half a dozen fortunes, who had spent millions of francs on the search of the Philosopher's Stone in this enlightened nineteenth century, the century of incredulity, the century of, etc. . . . He was maligned and calumniated; he was branded with the contemptuous epithet of "The Alchemist." "He wants to make gold!" they scoffed, and cast it in his teeth.

Has this much-belauded century of ours shown itself so different from all other centuries? It has left genius to die with the brutal indifference of past ages that beheld the deaths of Dante, Cervantes, Tasso, *e tutti quanti;* and sovereign peoples recognize the work of genius even more slowly than kings.

So these opinions concerning Claes had gradually filtered downward from the aristocratic section to the bourgeoisie,

and from the bourgeoisie to the people. Profound compassion was felt for the aged chemist by people of his own rank, and the populace looked on him with a sort of amused curiosity; both ways of regarding him implied the scornful *Vae victis* with which the crowd closes over fallen greatness.

People, as they went past the house, used to point out the rose-window of the attic where so much gold and coal had been wasted. When Balthazar went along the street, they pointed the finger at him; his appearance was often the signal for a joke or a pitying word from the children or workpeople; but Lemulquinier, ever on the watch, translated the whisperings into a murmur of admiration for his master, who never suspected the real truth.

Balthazar's eyes still preserved the wonderful clearness which an inward vision of great ideas had given to them, but he had grown deaf. For the peasants, and for vulgar or superstitious minds, the old man was a wizard. The old and splendid home of the Claes was spoken of in narrow streets and country cottages as the "Devil's House"; nothing was lacking to give color to these absurd tales; even Lemulquinier's appearance gave rise to some of the lying legends about his master. When, therefore, the poor, faithful, old servant went out to buy their scanty supply of necessaries in the market, he not only paid higher prices than any one else for his meagre purchases, but he could buy nothing without receiving insults thrown in as a sort of make-weight; he even thought himself lucky if the superstitious market-women did not refuse to supply him with his miserable pittance of food, for it too often happened that they were afraid to endanger their souls by dealing with a tool of Satan.

The general feeling of the town was hostile to the old great man and the companion of his labors. They were not the better thought of because they were ill clad and wore the shabby clothing of decent poverty that shrinks from begging. Open insult was sure to be offered them sooner or later; and

Pierquin, for the sake of his family, always took the precaution of sending two or three of his servants to follow the old men at a distance, and to interfere, if necessary, to protect them, for the influence of the Revolution of July had not improved the manners of the populace.

By some inexplicable chance Claes and Lemulquinier had gone out early that morning, and M. and Mme. Pierquin's secret vigilance was for once at fault; the two old men were out alone in the town. On their way home they sat down to rest in the Place Saint-Jacques, on a bench in the sun. Boys and children were continually passing by on their way to school, and when they looked across the square and saw the two helpless old men, whose faces brightened as they basked in the sunlight, the children made little groups, and began to talk. Children's chatter usually ends in laughter, and laughter leads to mischief, which has no cruel intention. Seven or eight of the first-comers stood at a little distance, and stared at the strange old faces; Lemulquinier heard their smothered laughter.

"There," cried one, "do you see that one with the forehead like a knee?"

"Yes."

"Well, then, he is a born Wise Man."

"Papa says he makes gold," put in another.

"Gold? What way does he make it?" asked a third, with a contemptuous gesture.

The smallest of the children, who carried a basket full of provisions, and was munching a slice of bread and butter, went artlessly up to the bench, and said to Lemulquinier—"Is it true that you make pearls and diamonds, sir?"

"Yes, little man," said Lemulquinier, smiling, and patting his cheeks; "learn your lessons, and grow very wise, and we will give you some."

"Oh, sir! give me some too!" was the general cry.

All the children scampered up and crowded about the two chemists like a flock of birds; their cries roused Balthazar from his musings; he gave a start that made them laugh.

"Ah! you little rascals, respect a great man!" said Lemulquinier.

"A harlequin!" shouted the children; "you are sorcerers! . . . yes, sorcerers! old sorcerers! *sorcerers*, ah!"

Lemulquinier sprang to his feet, raised his cane, and threatened the children, who promptly fled, and picked up stones and mud. A workman who was eating his breakfast not far away looked up and saw Lemulquinier take his cane to drive the children away, thought that he had beaten them, and came to their aid with the formidable cry, "Down with the sorcerers!"

Thus encouraged, the children were pelting the two old men with stones as the Comte de Solis, followed by Pierquin's servants, came into the square. They were too late to stop the shower of mud with which the children bespattered the great man and his servant; the mischief was done. Balthazar had hitherto preserved the full force of his faculties by the monastic habits and temperate life of a man of science, in whom one all-absorbing passion had extinguished all others. In the course of his ruminations the meaning of this scene suddenly dawned on him. The sudden revulsion of feeling, the contrast between the ideal world in which he lived and the real world about him, was too great a shock; he fell into Lemulquinier's arms, struck down by paralysis. He was carried home on a stretcher, his two sons-in-law and the servants going with him. Nothing could prevent the crowd that gathered from following the old man to his house. Félicie and her children were there already, and Gabriel and his wife had come from Cambrai, hearing through their sister of Marguerite's return.

The old man's return to his house was piteous to see. Even as he lay between life and death his chief terror seemed to be the thought that his children would discover the wretchedness in which he had been living. As soon as a bed could be made up in the parlor, every care was bestowed on Balthazar, and toward the end of the day some hopes of his recovery were entertained. But in spite of all

that skill could do, the paralysis had left him in an almost childish condition. After the other symptoms had abated, his speech was still affected, perhaps because anger had taken all power to speak from him when he attempted to remonstrate with the children.

General indignation was felt in the town when the news of the affair became known. Some mysterious law working in the minds of men had wrought a revulsion of feeling, and M. Claes regained his popularity. He suddenly became a great man. All the admiration and esteem which had been so long withdrawn was his again. Every one praised his patient toil, his courage, his strength of will, his genius. The magistrates were disposed to treat the small delinquents very harshly; but the evil was done, and Claes's own family were the first to ask that the affair should be smoothed over.

The parlor was refurnished by Marguerite's directions, silken hangings covered the bare walls where the carved panels once had been; and when, a few days after his seizure, Claes recovered the use of his faculties, he found himself among luxurious surroundings; nothing that could contribute to his comfort had been forgotten. Marguerite came into the parlor just as he tried to say that surely she must have come back. A flush came over Balthazar's face at the sight of her; his eyes were full of tears that did not fall; he was still able to grasp his daughter's hand in his cold fingers, and in this pressure he put all the feelings and the thoughts that he could not utter. There was something very sacred and solemn in this farewell, from a dying brain and a heart to which gratitude had brought back some of the glow of the warmth of life.

Exhausted by all his fruitless labors, worn out by his wrestlings with a giant problem, seeing, perhaps, with despair in his heart, the oblivion that waited for his memory, the Titan neared the end of his life. Everything about him spoke of his children's reverent affection. There were signs of wealth and plenty, if these things could have rejoiced his eyes; the fair picture of their faces to gladden his heart.

He could now only express his affection for them by looks, and his eyes were always full of tenderness; it was as if they had suddenly acquired a strange and varied power of speech, and the light that shone in them was a language easy to understand.

Marguerite paid her father's debts; and though the ancient glories of the House of Claes had departed, it was shortly refurnished with a magnificence that effaced all memories of its forlorn condition. She was never absent from Balthazar's bedside, and strove to guess his thoughts, and to anticipate his slightest wish.

Several months went by in alternations of hope and despair that mark the progress of the final struggle between life and death in an aged frame. His children came to see him every morning, and spent the day in his room; they dined there in the parlor by his bedside, and only left him while he slept. The newspapers seemed to be his principal resource; he took a great interest in the political events of the time, listening attentively to M. de Solis, who read them aloud to him, and sat close beside him that he might hear every word.

One night toward the end of the year 1832 Balthazar's condition grew critical; the nurse, alarmed by a sudden change in the patient, sent for Dr. Pierquin, and when he came, he decided to remain; Claes's convulsions seemed so like the agony of death that the doctor feared any moment might be his last.

The old man was struggling against the paralysis that bound his limbs. He made incredible efforts to speak; his lips moved, but no sound came from them; his thoughts seemed to blaze from his eyes; his face was drawn with unheard-of anguish; great drops of perspiration broke out on his forehead; his fingers twitched nervously in his despair.

That morning when his children came and embraced him with the affection that grew more intense and more clinging with the near approach of death, he showed none of the happiness that he always felt in their tenderness.

Emmanuel, at a warning glance from Pierquin, hastily tore the newspaper from its wrapper, thinking that perhaps the reading might divert Balthazar's mind from his physical sufferings. As he unfolded the sheet the words DISCOVERY OF THE ABSOLUTE caught his eyes and startled him, and he read the paragraph to Marguerite under his breath. It told of a bargain concluded by a celebrated Polish mathematician for the secret of the Absolute, which he had discovered. At the conclusion of the paragraph Marguerite asked her husband for the paper, but, low as the tones of his voice had been, Balthazar had heard him.

Suddenly the dying man raised himself on his elbows; his glance seemed like lightning to his terror-stricken children, the hair that fringed his temples rose, every wrinkle in his face quivered with excitement, a breath of inspiration passed over his face and made it sublime. He raised a hand, clinched in frenzy, with the cry of Archimedes—EUREKA! (*I have found it!*) he called in piercing tones, then he fell heavily back like a dead body, and died with an awful moan. His despair could be read in the frenzied expression of his eyes until the doctor closed them. He could not leave to science the solution of the Great Enigma revealed to him too late, as the veil was torn asunder by the fleshless fingers of Death.

Gardner Webb College Library

F
Balzac

Balzac, Honoré de
The wild ass's skin

PQ
2161
.C65
v.21

PQ2161 .C65 Balzac, Honor e de,
Honor e de Balzac in twenty-fi
0 0000 00094388 5
Gardner-Webb University Library